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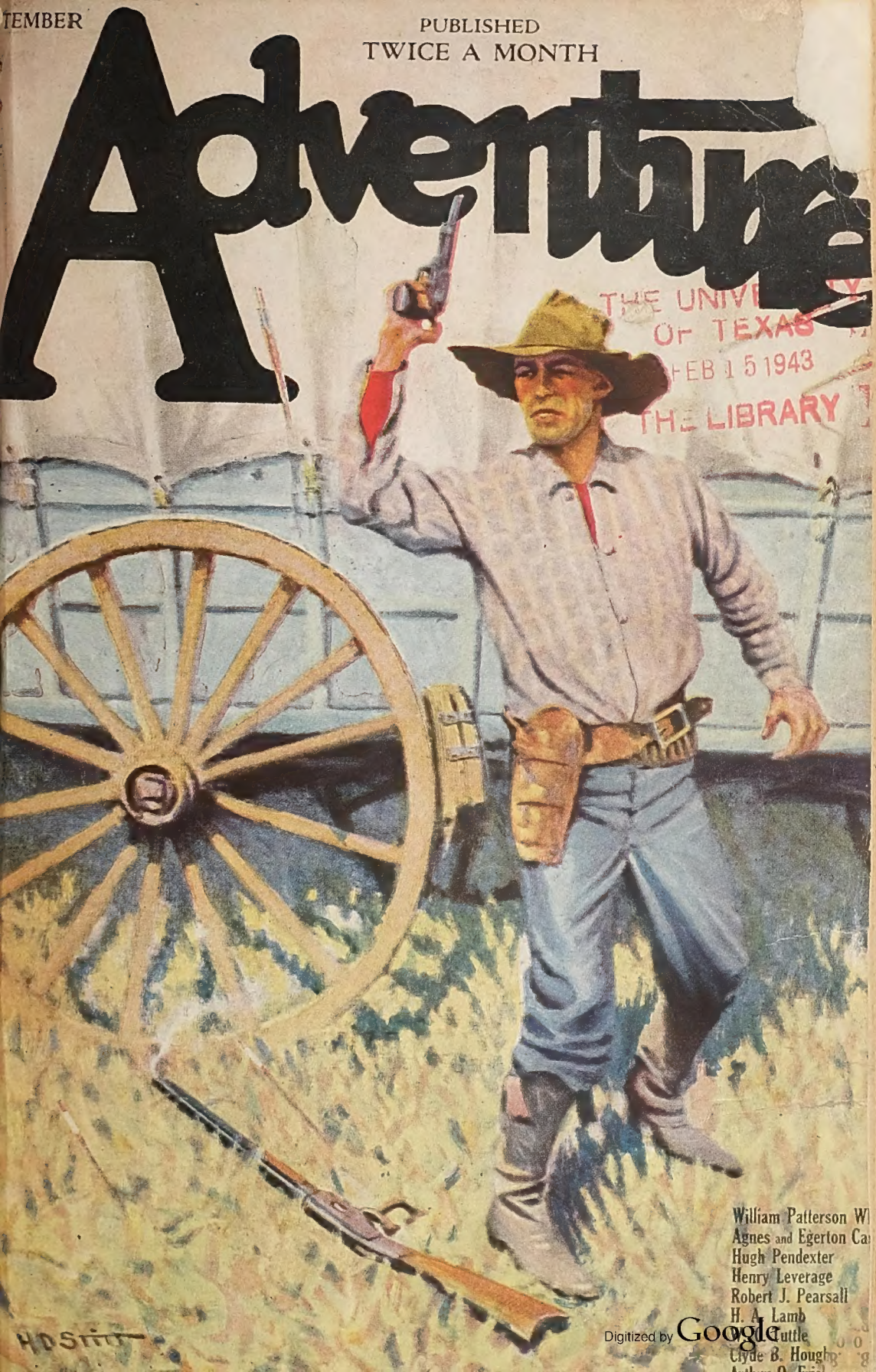

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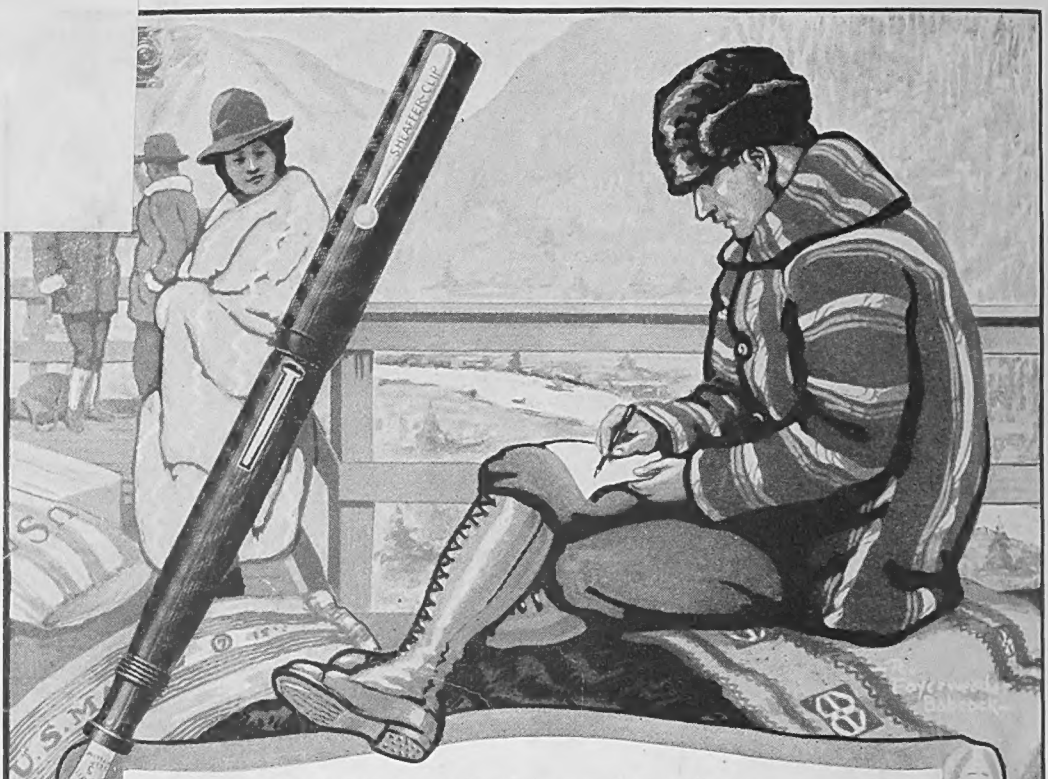

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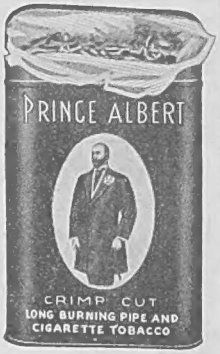

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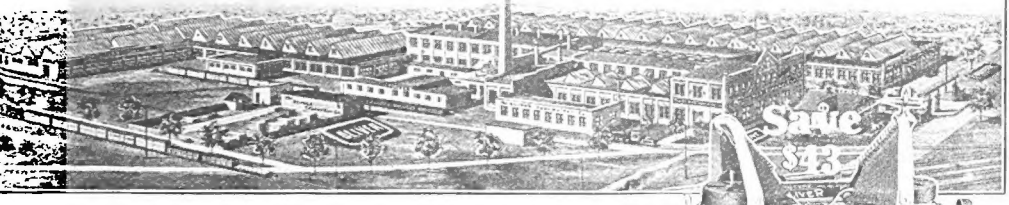

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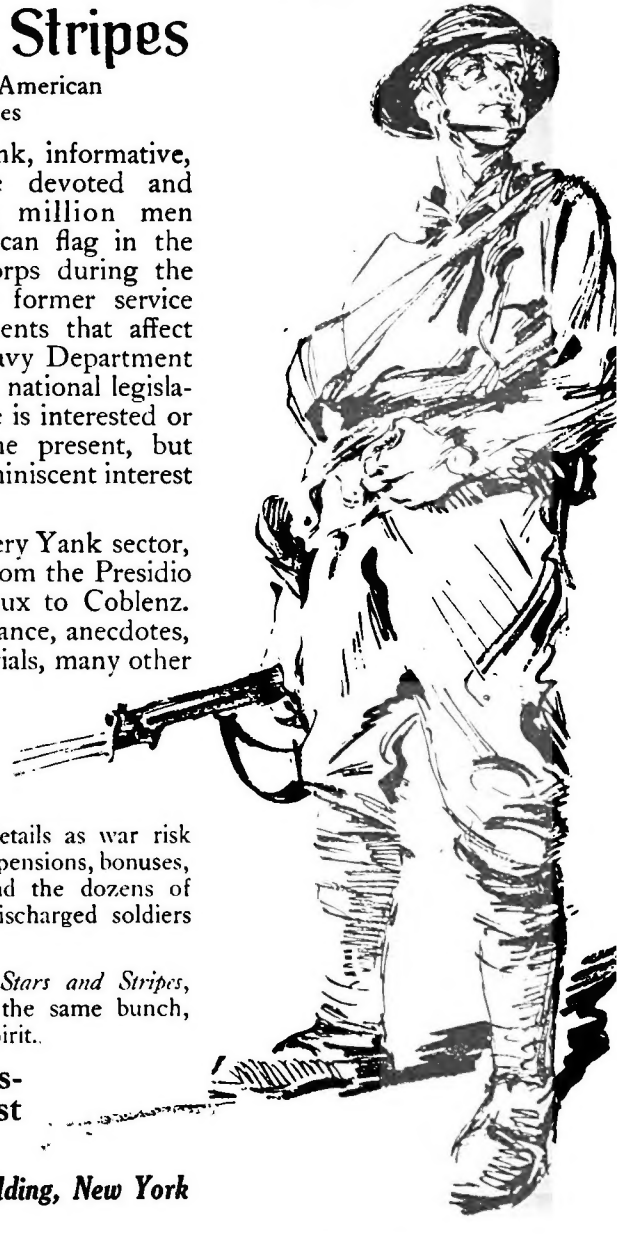

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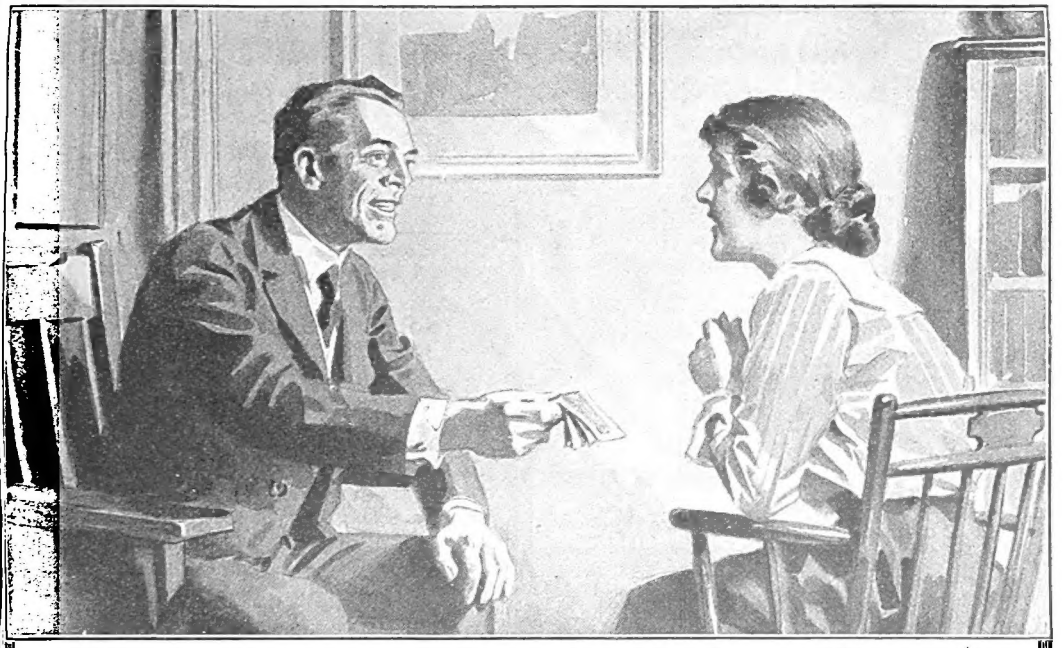

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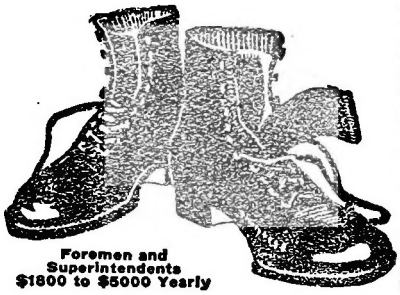

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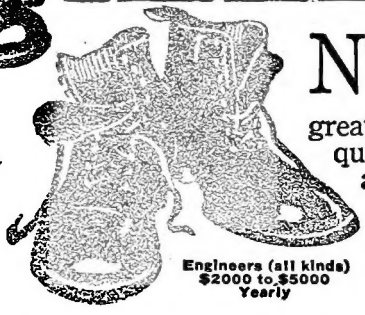

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LAND AND SEA

WHY does a man go out to risk his life in the frozen wilderness of the North? Why is it better for him to go alone and find his soul than to go armored with hired men and equipment and find a continent? These are the questions that start *Curtis Baird* on his big adventure, the story of which you will follow with intense interest as Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton tell it in our next issue: "Smooth Prizes," a complete novelette.

HE IS a lawyer, a member of many high-toned clubs. He goes down to the water-front. But Fate waits around the corner with a black-jack in its hand, and when he comes to he is in the forecastle of the "stinkin' ol' *Belle of Hindustan*." What happened next is told in "The Sea Lawyer," a complete novelette by E. S. Pladwell in our First October issue.

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Adventure

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The RIDER OF THE GRAY HORSE

A Complete Novelette

By H. A. LAMB

Author of "The Roof of the World," "The Star of Evil Omen," etc.

In the temples are the many-handed gods. High is the wisdom of the gods.
Is the wisdom of the gods one with Fate? Nay, how can it be known?
And in the palace is the face of a woman. There is perfume in her heavy hair, and the eyes of the maiden are dark, as with sleep. Her hand is small as a lotus blossom.
Yet in her petal-hand is the destiny of a man, of many men. The gods have ordained it, and it is true.

KHLIT, called by his enemies the Cossack of the Curved Saber, was followed.

He was aware of this. It caused him no uneasiness. For, he thought, if a rider carries nothing of value, should he fear thieves? He was not less watchful, however, on that account. It was the Year of the Rat, reckoned by the Chinese calendar—in the first decade of the seventeenth century of the Christian era—and the border of the desert of Gobi was a refuge of the lawless.

From time to time the Cossack reined in his horse and glanced backward over the wind ridges which formed an ocean of sand on three sides of the rider. On the fourth was the river Tarim. This Khlit was following, having heard that it would take him from the desert to the southern mountains. Beyond these mountains, he had been told by wandering priests, was the fair land of Ladak and Ind.

Wise in the ways of warfare and plunder, the old Cossack knew that only one rider followed him. Save for this half-perceived shadow that clung to his path, Khlit was alone. Such was his custom. Years since he had ridden from the war camp of the Cossacks—an outcast.

Now, disgusted with the silken treachery of the men of China, whither he had come from Tartary, the warrior had taken up his journey in a new direction, south. A veteran of many battles, impatient of authority, his shrewdness, enforced by very expert sword-play, had safeguarded him in a time when men's lives hung by slender

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threads. And had earned him enemies in plenty.

As he guided his mount beside the river-bank Khlit meditated. Why should one rider follow him? It was clearly to be seen that he carried no goods worthy of plunder. Merely some handfuls of dried meat and milk curds in his saddle-bags. Even his horse was not one to be coveted by a desert-man, being a shaggy steppe pony.

Perhaps the rider in his rear planned to wait until he dismounted at nightfall, slay him and take the horse. Yet it was not the custom of the Gobi bandits to hunt their prey alone.

Down a steep clay bank his pony slid, pursuing the half visible caravan track marked by dried bones and camel droppings. At the bottom of the slope, beside a stunted tamarisk, Khlit halted and faced about, drawing a pistol and adjusting the priming. He would see, he decided, what manner of man followed him.

Quietly the Cossack waited, his tall form upright in the saddle, sheepskin *svitza* thrown back to allow free arm play. His keen eyes peered under tufted brows at the summit of the mound down which he had come, searching the sky-line.

The stillness of the place was unbroken. The sluggish river moving through the waste was lifeless. There were no birds or game in the region. Even the warmth of a Summer sun was seasoned by the high altitude of the southern Gobi.

The horse pricked up his ears. Khlit lifted his weapon and scowled. By now the other rider must be near. His sharp ears had caught the impact of a stone dislodged from a near-by ridge.

Back and forth along the ridge summit his glance flickered. There was no sign of movement. A second sound arrested his attention. It was faint, coming from no definite direction. It was a low, whispering laugh.

The sound came from the stillness around him, softly mocking, almost caressing. It was a tiny sound, akin to the drip of sand. It might have issued from the ground under his feet. Then he heard a brief, dull mutter, as of a sword drawn from a rusted scabbard.

Still Khlit waited, impassive. His horse seemed to have lost interest in what was passing near at hand. In fact, Khlit himself was not oversure the sounds had not been a trick of the imagination.

With a stifled oath he swerved his mount and spurred up the ridge, his weapon ready in his free hand. His pursuer, apparently, had sighted him and turned back. The pony dug his leather-shod hoofs valiantly into the sand, which afforded evil footing, and gained the summit panting.

Khlit cast a quick glance over the plain. Nothing was to be seen of the other rider. True, the depressions between the ridges might shelter the other. But the scattered tamarisks and forlorn bushes by the river offered no concealment. Khlit was standing on the edge of the bank some hundred feet above the water, and the thickets in the region whence he had come were clear to view.

He looked down thoughtfully at his horse's tracks, outlined along the caravan trail. Then he swore aloud.

"Dog of the devil!" he grunted.

Beside his own tracks were those of another horse. They came within a yard of where he was, then ceased.

Khlit searched the summit of the ridge carefully. There was no mistaking the message in the sand. A second horse, making small, clearly indented tracks, had walked nearly to the crest of the sand. It had not returned, for there were no traces leading rearward. Nor had it passed him—his own eyes had been witness to that.

The Cossack replaced the pistol in his belt and tugged at his heavy mustache. The sounds might have been his imagining. Certainly the soft laugh had startled him. But the hoof-prints were not fancy.

Khlit thought briefly of the tales he had heard from the *gylongs*—wandering beggar priests of Buddha—concerning the *ghils* of the desert. These were spirits which followed the course of travelers, appearing beside them in the shape of men and luring them to destruction.

Woman's tales, he reflected, and not to be believed. The priests had warned him against the shrill cries of the *ghils* heard at night. But he was familiar with the strange noises the sands make at times, similar to the sound of drums or horse's hoofs.

The priests, he reasoned, would no doubt say that he had been followed by one of the spirits of the desert, which took flight into the air when he observed it. Khlit scowled at the tracks in the sand.

Undoubtedly another horse had come

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to the sand ridge. Since it was not to be seen, it had left. But where, and how?

Khlit laughed, a gruff hearty laugh, and slapped his thigh. Then he dug spurs into the pony's sides and as the animal sprang forward jerked the beast's head to one side. Down the embankment of sand into the river went pony and rider.

II

"HO, one-without-sense!" growled Khlit as the pony struggled in the current of the Tarim. "Do you fear to do what another has done? Nay, we go not back here."

The thought had come to Khlit, standing on the ridge, of how the other rider had vanished. Only one way was possible—into the river. And a slope of loose sand, as the Cossack knew, left no tracks.

He guided his pony down the current in the direction he had been going. This way the other must have gone. Or Khlit would have seen the rider as he searched the river-bank to the rear. Clearly his companion of the desert path was anxious to pass him by rather than meet him. This stirred Khlit's curiosity the more.

As he crouched in the saddle, Cossack fashion, he scanned the shore keenly. His pursuer, he thought, must have been anxious to press ahead. And to escape observation. Otherwise the rider would have passed him by along the sand ridges instead of choosing the river. Of course, to do so would render the other visible to Khlit. Hence the leap into the Tarim.

Who, wondered Khlit, rode the caravan track alone and in haste, yet in fear of observation?

With difficulty Khlit kept the pony's head away from the bank. The water, in spite of the hot rays of the sun, was cold and torpid, winding between its banks with the silence of a huge reptile passing over the barren waste of the desert. A cold wind stirred the sand on the ridges and fanned Khlit's beard.

The Cossack presently gave an exclamation of satisfaction and headed for the bank. He had seen the tracks of a horse leading up the slope. Dark water stains showed that the horse and rider he was following had but recently passed that way. He had guessed correctly the maneuver of his erstwhile pursuer.

He urged his pony into a quick trot, following the traces in the sand. Before long he was convinced that the other's mount was fleet of foot, for he gained no sight of rider or beast, urge his horse as he would.

He saw only that the rider had returned to the caravan track. The sun, which had been low on the plain to the west, disappeared suddenly. The sky overhead changed from a clear blue to a dull purple. Khlit reined in his pony and dismounted.

Warmth, gathered during the day, was still exuding from the sand, but the Cossack knew that the night would be chill. He picketed his beast in the depression between two sand mounds, collected a bundle of tamarisk roots and kindled a small fire.

He placed his leather saddle-cloth between the sand slope and the fire and seated himself thereon with his saddle-bags, preparatory to making a meal of dried meat. The other rider, he thought, would not molest him, judging by what had happened at the river.

Khlit lay back on his heavy coat, gazing up into the purple infinity overhead. One by one the stars were glittering into being. Khlit knew them all. He had followed their guidance over the roof of the world into strange countries. Unlike most men, he was best contented when alone. His few companions in arms had been slain, and as for women, the Cossack regarded them as rather more troublesome than magpies or the inquisitive and predatory steppe fox.

The next instant he was on his feet, sword drawn, limbs taut and head sunk forward between his shoulders. A horse and rider had moved into the circle of firelight.

Khlit's first glance made sure that the intruder held no pistol. His second, that no weapons at all were visible. Nevertheless, he did not lower his sword. He had seen death reward imprudence too often.

And then he heard the echo of the soft laugh that had startled him by the river bank. Peering at the newcomer, he grunted. It was a woman, clad in a fur-tipped *khalat*, under which a silk shawl was wrapped over head and breast. Over a veil which shielded the lower half of her face two dark eyes scanned him calmly. Black hair of shimmering texture, evenly divided, crowned a high, fair forehead.

So much Khlit observed in surprize.

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He noted that the horse was a mettled gray stallion and the saddle trappings costly.

The rider of the horse spoke, in a limpid tongue unknown to Khlit. Then Khlit sheathed his sword.

"Nay, I know not your song, little night-bird," he said in Uigur, the semi-Turkish dialect of Central Asia. "Devil take me—I knew not the great desert breeds such as you."

The dark eyes snapped angrily.

"What matters your knowledge, O small-of-wit?" the rider lisped in the same tongue. "Among my people a gray horse is a sigil of wisdom. Here I find it on the mouth of a fool."

Khlit considered the woman in surprize. By the shifting firelight she appeared beautiful of face. Certainly her figure, under the *kahlat* was rounded and slim. What was such a maiden doing alone on the desert? True, they were not two days' ride from the city of Khoten; but the caravan tracks were peopled with scoundrels, and Khoten itself was a rendezvous for the lawless of all nations.

Moreover, the woman puzzled him. She was not Chinese; her beauty was too great for a Khirghiz or flat faced Usbek. Her dress and imperious manner were not those of a Turk.

She leaned forward in the saddle, eyes bent intently on him. Her attitude suggested that she was ready to wheel and flee on the instant.

"Hey, you have truly the tongue of a magpie!" grumbled Khlit. "Were you the rider that braved the waters of the Tarim to pass me by along the caravan trail?"

"Aye, dullard. While you were swearing like a *caphar* and reading lies in the tracks in the sand. Now it is my whim to seek you. A fool, and an old fool, is harmless."

So saying she urged her horse nearer to the fire by a slight pressure of the knees—for she rode astride, as a man.

"Whence come you? Whither go you, in the great desert, O prattle-tongue?" asked Khlit.

The bright eyes over the veil were fixed on the fire, yet Khlit was aware that they kept him well in view.

"Nay, gray-beard, am I other than a *ghil* of the waste? Have you seen me come to your fire? I am here at the word of one who was master of the earth. Now he is dead, yet his word keeps me here."

"Ha! The fat Son of Heaven who is master of China?"

"Nay—" the black eyes half closed in a tantalizing smile— "a greater than Wan Li. Because of his death there is no bed where I am safe, nor any palace gate where I may enter. From beyond the grave his hand reaches out to me."

"Child's riddles," grumbled Khlit, striding to the fire.

He cared little that a woman of rank, and unescorted, should be in Gobi. One thing he had guessed. The soft, quick speech of the woman stirred his memory. He recalled another who had spoken similarly. His visitor was a Persian by birth.

She placed a jeweled hand lightly on his shoulder.

"I am hungry," she said plaintively. "And those who were to meet me here by the Tarim, two days' journey from Khoten, have not come. I have no food—and it grows cold."

"Dismount, then, and eat."

Long and earnestly the dark eyes scanned the tall Cossack. As if reassured, the girl slipped from saddle of the gray steed to ground, uttering an exclamation of pain as the circulation started in numbed feet. Khlit silently arranged a seat for her on his saddle-cloth and set about preparing a meal with the small means at his disposal.

III

"WHILE I sleep, gray-beard, you may mount your horse and watch, lest others approach too near. With the dawn you should see two riders coming from the south in haste, for they are belated—a sin worthy of death by bastinado to those not of such high caste as these two."

Khlit eyed his companion grimly. Was he one to be ordered about by a woman? Even such as this one? For she had put down her veil on eating, explaining that, as he was a *caphar*—a Christian—there was no sin in his seeing the countenance of a woman who was a true believer. When Khlit asked how she knew he was a Christian she touched the miniature gold cross he wore at his neck with a ringed forefinger. Khlit saw that the ring bore an emerald of great size.

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"There were some of your faith at the court of the great king," she remarked idly.

"What name bears this khan?"

She glanced at him and smiled fleetingly. Resting her rounded chin on her hand, she gazed at the fire. Khlit saw that her beauty was as fine as the texture of a peacock's plumage, as delicate as the tinted heart of a rare shell. Her eyes were not aslant, but level as his own. The molding of the luminous brow and the tiny mouth bespoke pride and intelligence. The dark hair peering from under the hood of the *khalat* was abundant and silk-like.

The shawl about her slender shoulders was open at the throat, revealing a splendid throat ringed in pearl necklaces. Here was a woman who had undoubtedly been mistress of many slaves, who was a Mohammedan, with jewels to the value of many horses—even a principality.

"Akbar, of Ind," she said.

Khlit had heard of Ind as a land of many peoples and great treasure, whence caravans came to China. As far as he had a purpose in his wandering, he was bound there.

"Are there many *yurts* and tents in Akbar's camp?" he inquired.

The girl stared at him frankly and threw back her head with a musical laugh.

"O steppe boor! O one-of-small-wisdom! There be palaces in the empire of Akbar the Mogul as many as the tents of one of your dirty Tatar camps." The laugh ended abruptly. "Nay, he has a following of millions of many faiths, who obey his word from Samarkand to the Ganges' mouth. And his word has laid the seal of death on Nur-jahan——"

She broke off, biting her lip swiftly with a vexed frown.

"Hey—is that the name they have given you, little night-bird?" Khlit yawned indifferently. "It has a strange sound."

"It is mine at the bidding of a prince, dolt!" she cried. "And you have heard it. That is an evil thing, for I wish it not to be known."

"It matters not," growled the Cossack, lighting his long stemmed black pipe while the woman regarded him with vexed intentness. "I shall not speak it—nay, I care little for the secrets of a palace courtesan."

Nur-jahan leaned swiftly toward him. Khlit caught the glitter of metal in the firelight and threw up his hand in time to seize the slender hand that held a dagger a few inches from his chest. He turned the girl's wrist curiously to the light, inspecting the tiny weapon, scarce larger than the jade pendants that twinkled at her ears.

"Are these the weapons of Ind?" he asked mildly, a glimmer in his deep-set eyes. "And have you forgotten, Nur-jahan, the faith of a follower of Mahomet, who may not slay one with whom he has shared bread and salt?"

With that he released the Persian's wrist. The girl's cheeks were crimson and her eyes brilliant with anger. But the dagger fell to her lap.

Truly, thought Khlit, she was one of rank, for an ordinary concubine would not be so quick to resent a slight. The favorite of a prince, perhaps.

"Harken, little spitfire. Why did you leave the land of Ind for the foul Gobi desert—alone?"

"Nay, not alone. There was one with me who is worth ten other warriors. In the morning he will come, by the caravan track. Let him find you gone, *caphar*, or your life will cease as the flame of a candle in the wind, and the ravens will eat of your head!"

"He must be a brave khan, then. But he left you, Nur-jahan, alone in the lap of Gobi. How may that be?"

"He went to Khoten for news—of Ind. For tidings, and another who came over the mountains to join us. Also, to get food, which we lacked. As I said, Chauna Singh is belated and I shall scold him well. Nay, *caphar*, I could not go to Khoten lest I be seen; and Breath of the Wind—" she pointed to the gray horse— "is a stallion of Kabul, fleeter than the beasts of this country. He would keep me safe."

"A good horse, little night-bird. But fear you not I will slay you for those jewels—" Khlit nodded at her throat— "take the stallion and leave your fair body for the eyes of this Chauna Singh?"

Nur-jahan shook her dark head with a smile.

"What will be, will be. And it is not written that my grave lies in the desert. Besides, I read honesty in your dull eyes—honesty and stupidity. Strong men are my slaves. Speak, *caphar!*" She shifted on the robe until her head was near his shoulder. "Without doubt you are old in the

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ways of loves and have had many women to your will. Have you seen one so fair as I? Speak—is it not so? A prince, ruler of ten thousand swords, swore I was more lovely than the gardens of Kashmir in Spring. Aye, than the lotus and tulips of the divine wife of Prithvi-Raj. What say you, old warrior?"

There was assurance in the poise of the splendid head near Khlit, and a soft undertone to the musical voice. Nur-jahan spoke artlessly, yet with the pride of one whose beauty had brought to her—power. And great power.

Khlit was conscious of a perfume that came from the silken garments under the heavy *khalat*—a mingling of faint musk and dried rose-leaves. He looked steadily into the dark eyes, eyes that were veiled shadows changing to luminous pools, deep and full as the waters of quiet lakes.

"You are a child, Nur-jahan," he said gruffly, "and there is evil in you as well as beauty."

Nur-jahan considered him gravely, drawing the *khalat* closer about her, for it grew cold.

"What is evil, old warrior?" she mused. "The word of Allah the wise tells us that we know not what is before us or behind. We are wind-swept leaves on the roadway of fate. Our lives are written before we come to the world. Why do you call me evil? Nay, I will show you that it is not so."

She paused, making designs in the sand with the dagger point. Khlit threw some more wood on the fire.

"You know my name," she continued. "And that must not be. I am hiding, to save myself from the decree of Akbar, who, when he felt the angel of death standing near, ordered my execution. There was no place in Ind where I would be safe—nor in Tibet or Ladak. So I came with one other over the mountains into the desert. You go to Khoten, doubtless, and my enemies are there. So you may not live to say that you have seen me."

Khlit made no response. His indifference vexed the girl.

"By the face of the Prophet, you are witless!" she stormed. "Nay, since you have shared bread with me, I will offer you a chance of life before Chauna Singh comes. Or he will assuredly slay you. For the life of one such as you—and a *caphar*—is of trifling importance beside my secret. In spite of your sharing food with me he will slay you very quickly. He is a swordsman among a thousand."

"Then I shall wait until I see him, prattle-tongue. I have not seen a true swordsman since a certain Tatar khan died at my side."

"Fool! If you stay, your grave is dug here. Get you to horse. It will be several hours before Chauna Singh will sight our fire. If you ride north at once, he may not follow far, for he will not leave me again for long. So you may save your skin."

Khlit stretched his gaunt arms, for he was sleepy and the woman's talk disturbed him.

"I go south to Khoten—not north," he responded curtly. "As for Chauna Singh, let him look to his own skin, if he stands in my way."

Nur-jahan stared at the Cossack as if she had not heard aright. She noted the deep-set eyes under gray brows, still alert in spite of their wrinkles, and the lean, hard cheeks, stretched firmly over the bones. A man not unlike her own people, she thought, yet one of rude dress and coarse bearing.

"Chauna Singh," she protested, "is a man in the prime of life, O one-without-wisdom, and you——"

"Truly, I am wearied of talk."

With this Khlit betook himself to the other side of the fire, where he rolled himself in his long coat and was asleep almost on the instant.

Thus it was that Khlit shared food and fire with the woman who came to him in the desert, whose name was strange to him. And Nur-jahan, watching sleepily by the tamarisk flames, thought that here was a man of a kind she had not met with, who cared not for her beauty and less for the threat of death, yet who gave up his shelter and the half of his food to her.

IV

It is written in the annals of the Raj that Pertap, the hero, gave his horse to a generous foe, thus risking death.

Wherefore do the men of the Raj cry: "Ho! Nfla ghora ki aswár," when they ride into battle. For the memory of a Rájput is long.

THE sound of voices wakened Khlit from a deep sleep. A glance told him that two riders had come up and were halted beside the woman, who was on her feet, talking to them.

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Khlit rose leisurely and stirred up the remnants of the fire. This done, he scanned the newcomers. Both were well clad and mounted. One, a lean man of great height, bore a scar the length of his dark cheek. The Cossack noted that he sat his horse with ease, that the beast was of goodly breed, that the peaked saddle was jewel mounted and that gold inlaid mail showed under the white satin vestment over the rider's square shoulders. His turban was small and knotted over one ear, the end hanging over the right shoulder.

He was heavily bearded and harsh of face, thanks in part to the scar which ran from chin to brow, blighting one eye, which was half closed. The other man Khlit passed over for the time. He was bent, with the fragile frame of a child and a mild, wrinkled face.

Nur-jahan was speaking urgently to the man with the scar, who frowned, shaking his turbaned head. His glance searched Khlit scornfully. Apparently he was refusing some request of the girl's. Without taking his eyes from the Cossack, he dismounted and strode toward the fire.

"Ho! Rider of the mangy pony!" he cried, in broken Uigur. "One without manners, of a race without honor. I have heard the tale of Nur-jahan and your death is at hand."

Khlit lifted his arm, showing his empty hand.

"I seek no quarrel, Chauna Singh," he said slowly. "I am no old woman, to gossip concerning the affairs of others. Peace! Go your way, and I go mine."

"To Khoten?" The bearded lip of Chauna Singh lifted in a snarl. "It may not be. Nay, I do not desire your death; but the life of Nur-jahan is my charge, and the sword is the only pledge that seals the lips of a man. Come, take your weapon!"

Khlit stared at the other grimly. He had no wish to quarrel. And Chauna Singh was an individual of formidable bearing. There was no help for it.

"Be it so," he said briefly.

On the instant the two curved blades were flashing together, the two warriors soft-stepping in the sand. The weapons, like the men, were of equal size. Chauna Singh, however, wore a vest of fine mail, while Khlit was protected only by his heavy coat.

The warrior attacked at once, his scimitar making play over Khlit's sheepskin cap. A tall man, the champion of Nur-jahan was accustomed to beat down the guard of an adversary. Khlit's blade was ever touching the scimitar, fending it skillfully before a stroke had gained headway.

Chauna Singh's one eye glittered and his mustache bristled in a snarl. Here was not the easy game he had anticipated. Nor was the Cossack to be tricked into a false stroke by a pretended lapse on his part—as the other speedily learned.

The girl and the other rider watched in intent silence. Khlit had sufficient faith in the honor of his foes not to fear a knife in his back at the hand of Chauna Singh's comrade. He had eyes for nothing but the dazzling play of the other's weapon, which ceaselessly sought head, throat and side.

While Khlit's sword made play his brain was not idle. He saw that Chauna Singh appeared tireless, while his own arm lacked the power of youth. Soon he would be at a disadvantage. He must put the fight to an issue at once.

And so Khlit lunged at Chauna Singh—lunged and sank on one knee as if from the impetus of his thrust. His blade, for a second, was lowered.

Had Chauna Singh not held his adversary in mild contempt he would have known that a swordsman of Khlit's skill would not have made such a blunder. But the Rájput, heated by the conflict, uttered a cry of triumph and swung aloft his scimitar.

"*Ho! Nila ghora ki aswár!*" he shouted—the war-cry of his race.

Ere the blow he planned had been launched, Chauna Singh jerked himself backward. Khlit's weapon had flashed up under his guard, and the wind of it fanned his beard. Had the Rájput been a whit less active on his feet his chin would have been severed from his neck. As it was, the outer fold of his turban fell to his shoulders in halves.

A blow upward from the knee—a difficult feat—was an old trick of the Cossack.

Momentarily the two adversaries were apart, eying each other savagely. The voice of Nur-jahan rang out.

"Stay, Chauna Singh! Peace! Hold your clumsy hand and let me speak!"

Khlit saw the girl step between them. At her whispered urging Chauna Singh sheathed his weapon with a scowl.

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"Harken, gray-beard, you be a pretty hand at sword-play. Almost you had dyed red the beard of stupid Chauna Singh. I have need of such men as you, and, verily, I can ill spare the big Rájput. You know my secret, and Chauna Singh, who has room for only one thought in his thick skull, will not consent to letting you go free. But come with us. Thus we can keep watch over your tongue."

The Cossack considered this, leaning on his sword.

"I go to Khoten, Nur-jahan," he made answer gruffly.

"And we likewise. These men have brought me news which takes us to the city. Come! In Khoten a lone man fares ill, for the place is a scum of thieves and slitthroats."

Khlit had no especial liking for company. On the other hand, Chauna Singh's sword-play had won his hearty respect. The Persian's words had not the ring of treachery. And her champion, although quick to draw blade, was not one to slay without warning.

"Whither go you from Khoten?" he asked.

Nur-jahan hesitated. But the man on the horse spoke, in a voice strangely musical.

"We go into the heart of peril, warrior—by a path beset with enemies. If you live, you will reach the hills of Kashmir and Ind and find honor at a Moghul's court. Have you heart for such a venture?"

Khlit glanced at the speaker curiously. The other could not have chosen words more to his liking. He saw a thin, dark face bent between slender shoulders, a sensitive mouth and shrewd, kindly eyes.

"Aye, khan," said Chauna Singh bluntly, "if you want good blows, given and taken, come with us—and gain a treasure of rare horses and jewels. But, give heed, your life will not be safe—for we face a thousand foes, we three, and a thousand that we see not or know not, until they strike."

"Be you men of the Mogul?"

Khlit saw the three exchange a curious glance. Nur-jahan's eyes lighted mockingly.

"If we live, khan—aye. But if we die we be foes of the mighty Mogul Akbar of Ind. Will you come, being our comrade-in-arms and the keeper of my secret?"

The Cossack sheathed his sword.

"Aye—be it so. Many enemies give honor to a man."

The Rájput strode forward, placing hand on lips and chest.

"By the white horse of Prithvi-Raj, I like it well! I have not met such a swordsman in a feast of moons. Ho! If we live, you will drink good wine of Shiraz and I will watch. If we die, we will spread a carpet of dead about us such as will delight the gods."

Nur-jahan's piquant face was smiling slightly, but the shrewd eyes of the man on the horse were inscrutable.

V

"AND it was as the *mir* said. The word of a dead man has doomed her. Because of her beauty is she doomed. It is written that a fair maiden is like to a ruby-cup of wine that heats the brain of men while it stirs their senses."

Hamar, the companion of Chauna Singh, smiled meditatively at Khlit, stroking his mustache with a thin hand. The man, Khlit had discovered, was a musician of Hind, a wandering philosopher of Nur-jahan's country. He it was who had come from Kashmir to Khoten with word from the Mogul court that they were to hasten back.

The four were trotting along the caravan track, a day's ride nearer the city. Nur-jahan on her gray horse, was leading, with Chauna Singh at her side. Khlit and the minstrel followed at some distance, keeping a wary eye on the rear, for they had passed one or two cortèges of merchants, journeying from Aksu to Khoten.

"How may that be?" grunted Khlit, who had no liking for riddles and twisted words. "When a man is dead he can not work harm."

"Nay, but this is Akbar, lord of Delhi, ruler of the Raj, conqueror of Kashmir and Sind—monarch of five times a hundred thousand blades. His whispered word was law from Turkestan to the Dekkan. A mighty man, follower of Mahomet, achieving by his lone strength the mastery of the Mogul empire. He is dead, but his word lives."

"And that word——"

"To slay Nur-jahan." The faded eyes of the minstrel had gleamed at mention of the glories of Akbar; now they were

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somber. A man of wisdom, thought Khlit, considering his companion, and a dreamer.

"Harken, khan." Hamar roused himself. "This is the story. Akbar carved for himself the empire of the Moguls, following in the footsteps of his illustrious grandsire, Baber. Yet is the empire formed of races of many faiths—Moslems from Turkestan, Hindus of Ind, Jains and Buddhists of Ladak and priests of another temple who are masters in the hills. To hold together such an empire, the ruler must be one with his subjects—and Akbar, of blessed wisdom, was a patron of many faiths. Men say that he died calling upon the gods of Brahma, although a Moslem. I have seen him bow the head in many temples. So he held the jealous races of the empire together. And so must his successor, Jahangir, do."

Hamar paused, glancing over the waste ahead of them, where the barren trunks of dead trees reared themselves above the whitened bones of camels.

"When Jahangir was a youth of fifteen," he resumed, "he met the maiden Mir-unnissa, now called Nur-jahan, in a palace festival. He gave the Persian girl two doves to hold for him. One escaped her grasp. Jahangir, angered, demanded how. Verily, then the proud temper of the maiden showed. 'Thus!' she cried and freed the other bird. From that moment the prince loved her—aye, stedfastly."

"The tale wearies me," growled Khlit. "Bah—doves and a maiden—what have they to do with an empire?"

"Much," smiled the minstrel patiently. "In our land men love passionately and long. Jahangir still desires Nur-jahan—and he is now Mogul. Akbar, foreseeing this in his wisdom, married the maiden to one Sher Afghan, a notable warrior and a proud man. Yet Nur-jahan fled from Sher Afghan when Akbar sickened."

"Wherefore?"

"Nay, you know not our people, khan. Jahangir, being ruler, will doubtless slay Sher Afghan, for the new Mogul's love for the maiden is great and they betrothed themselves, one to the other, when they were young. Again, Akbar thought of this and pledged the friends of his deathbed to slay the girl before she became the queen of Jahangir."

Khlit thought that Nur-jahan might well prove a disturbing influence over a young ruler. Yet surely there must be a further reason for Akbar's command of death. Hamar, as if reading his thoughts, pointed to the slim figure of the girl.

"Shall a serpent come into a nest of eggs? So reasoned Akbar. The maiden Nur-jahan is devoted to Islam and the rule of the Moslem. She is strong of will, and she would win Jahangir to her views. Then the Mogul would join himself to the Mohammedans and the empire of Baber and Akbar would vanish, thus!"

Hamar plucked a dried rose from a wallet at his girdle and tossed it into the air. The delicate petals fell apart and dropped into the sand. Hamar watched them moodily. His voice had been vibrant with feeling.

"Nur-jahan escaped death?" Khlit demanded, for the other's story had begun to interest him.

"Once, by aid of Chauna Singh, a follower of Sher Afghan. And fled over the mountains. Now Jahangir has sent me from the Agra court with word for her to return. Once in his palace, he will safeguard her."

"What of the knight, Sher Afghan?"

Hamar lifted his eyebrows slightly and waved a thin hand.

"A broken twig swept away by the current of a strong river—have you seen it, khan? Not otherwise is Sher Afghan. He is a proud man, who will not give up his wife—even if she be so only in name. His days are numbered."

Khlit nodded. He had seen a citadel stormed because of the beauty of an insulted woman and the emperor of Hân pardon treachery because of the smile of a favorite. The witchery of such women, he reflected, was an evil thing.

"Hey," he laughed. "Then the matter is simple. We have but to take the maiden to Agra, to the embraces of her lover, the Mogul."

The minstrel smiled inscrutably.

"Think you so? You forget the word of Akbar. Among his followers are the priests of Kali, the four-armed, and—from the mountains—disciples of Bon, the Destroyer. They have sworn an oath to him that the girl shall not live. Their shrines are found from Khoten to Delhi and in the hills. Their servants are numbered as the sands of the great desert. Likewise they are priests of the gods, and the death of the

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Persian Moslem will safeguard their faith in Ind. Why did not Jahangir send an army to bring her to him? Nay, in the ranks would be assassins of Kali. The elephant drivers would see that she fell from the howdah."

Khlit grunted scornfully. Hamar's eyes flashed as he pointed ahead of them, where the dust of a caravan rose.

"If we drink from a cup, we must look for poison. If we sleep in a caravanserai, the camel men will come to us like evil *lings* with drawn knives. We be but four against a thousand. Aye, from his tomb, the hand of Akbar has set the seal of sacrifice on Nur-jahan's forehead."

VI

In every Temple they seek Thee; in every language they praise Thee. Each faith says it holds Thee.

Thee I seek from Temple to Temple.

But only the dust of the Rose Petal remains to the seller of perfume.

Akbar, the Mogul.

THE caravanserai was a low stone wall built around a well by the desert route. It was littered with dung and the leavings of former visitors. In the twilight it loomed desolate and vacant.

Chauna Singh had been unwilling to rest there the night, but Hamar pointed out that the sun was down, the air chill, and they had need of water. True, the caravan they had passed a short way back was hard on their heels; but they had been seen as they rode by it, and if danger was to be expected from the merchants and their followers it was better to face it in the lighted enclosure of the caravanserai than to journey further into the desert—where they could easily be traced.

Nur-jahan added her voice to Hamar's, and the Rájput, grumbling, bestirred himself to build a fire for the woman on the blackened débris of the hearth. Khlit tended the horses—a task readily yielded to him by Chauna Singh, who was not overfond of manual labor, except on the behalf of his mistress.

Khlit saw that the enclosure was similar to a Khirghiz *aul*—sufficiently large to accommodate them and the cortège which presently entered. Chauna Singh had shrewdly chosen a corner of the place farthest from the gate, where they could face the new arrivals. He aided the Cossack in preparing some rice over the fire, both apparently giving no heed to the other caravan but keeping a keen lookout.

"They be low-caste traders from the Han country," muttered the Rájput beneath his breath. "Men without honor, poor fighters; still—with ruffianly following."

"Hillmen—Khirghiz, a few," assented Khlit, who knew the folk of the uplands. "Hook-nosed Usbeks, a fat mandarin or two, some beggarly Dungans—and a swine-faced Turkoman."

"Aye, the Turkoman may bear watching. He has a score of rascals."

Chauna Singh glanced at Khlit in some surprize at the Cossack's knowledge. The look was scornful, half askance, the look of a man who traced his ancestors to the gods and held honor dearer than life.

"Whence come you, khan, that you know the people of the hills? What is your caste?"

"For the present, Chauna Singh," said Khlit; "I come from Tartary. There I was but one among a hundred khans. They called me Khlit, of the Curved Saber."

"That is a strange name," meditated the Rájput. "Nay, by Shiva, you must be more than a small khan—a leader of a hundred! Surely, you had rank?"

Khlit stirred the fire calmly. He traced his ancestors to Ghenghis Khan, and the curved sword was that of Kaidu, overlord and hero of Tatary. Yet the Rájput's insolence irked him. Chauna Singh did not know that Khlit had been Kha Khan of the remaining tribes of Tatary.

"A leader of a hundred?" he growled. "Not so. I am lord of nothing save yonder pony. As for rank, I once spoke to the great emperor of Han—and he gave me some gold."

The Cossack's whiskers twitched in a smile, for he had saved the emperor Wan Li from burial alive in the tomb of his ancestors and had appropriated the treasure of the tomb as payment. But this he neglected to confide to Chuana Singh.

"Ho—gold!" The Rájput muttered, giving up his questioning as fruitless. "You will have rubies and sapphires if you live to reach Jahangir."

"You are a follower of Jahangir?" asked Khlit, eyeing the lean face framed in the firelight.

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Chauna Singh's head snapped up.

"Since the breath of life was in Ind, a Rájput has been faithful to his lord."

Nur-jahan kept in the background as they ate. She had performed her after-sunset prayer as quietly as might be, keeping her veil drawn close. Hamar had impressed upon her the need of caution.

Even Khlit felt something of the alertness that possessed the two followers of the girl. Truly, they must fear the danger they stood from the priests of Akbar, the followers of Kali and Bon. When the Turkoman strolled over from the other fires with several men and stared at them, the Cossack saw Chauna Singh rise indolently, stretch and take up a position between Nur-jahan and the newcomers.

Hamar had drawn forth his *vina*—a guitar-like instrument—at which he was plucking softly. The Turkoman's slant eyes took in the scene and he swaggered forward.

Khlit did not hear what the caravan man said to Hamar, but Chauna Singh said in a whisper that he was asking if Nur-jahan were a slave.

The minstrel responded idly, without raising his eyes from the guitar. As he did so Khlit saw the ragged followers of their visitor edge to either side of the fire, as if to watch the musician.

Intently as he watched, he could not tell if the movement was preconceived or chance. The Turkoman spat into the fire, squatting opposite Hamar.

"He asked," whispered the Rájput to Khlit, "for a song. He has the face of a dolt, but—take care lest the followers get behind you. They have knives in their girdles."

The Turkoman, who announced that his name was Bator Khan, demanded in a loud voice that Hamar make them a tune and the slave girl dance. It was a breach of politeness that Chauna Singh and the minstrel passed over in silence. The attendants had ceased moving forward and were staring at them, chattering together, clearly waiting for a word from Bator Khan.

The conduct of the group did not impress Khlit favorably. They were too curious, too serious in what they did. Suppose that the evil-faced Turkoman should prove to be an enemy of Nur-jahan? They were four against a dozen.

The Cossack was too wise in the ways of violence to show his foreboding. He waited quietly, his hands near his sword hilt, for what was to come. Perhaps Bator Khan was merely a merchant who saw an opportunity to seize a slave girl. If so, he would not be likely to try force unless he thought he could take the three men unaware.

A silence fell as Hamar leaned forward to the fire. Khlit saw him lay a white silk scarf on the ground before him. Reaching behind him, the minstrel placed a crystal goblet on the cloth.

"Bring water," he said softly to one of the followers of Bator Khan. "And fill the goblet to the edge—no more. The water must be clean."

The man did as he was bid, with a glance at the Turkoman. All eyes were on the minstrel as he took up his guitar. His delicate hands passed lightly over the strings, which vibrated very faintly.

"You have asked for a song, Bator Khan," he said mildly. "So be it. I will play the *bhairov*, which is the song of water. Nay, you know not the high art of music—the training which enables one versed in the mysteries of tones to influence the elements—fire, air and water—which correspond to the tones. But watch, and you will see."

With a swift motion he tossed something from his hand into the flames. The smoke grew denser. A strong, pungent odor struck Khlit's nostrils. Some of the men of Bator Khan started back fearfully. Those who held their ground stared wide-eyed. Khlit knew the superstition of their breed.

Hamar closed his eyes. Sounds, faint and poignant, came from the strings under his fingers. Khlit had seen him exchange no word with Chauna Singh or Nur-jahan. Reflecting on this later, he reasoned that the other two must have known what the minstrel was about.

Bator Khan stared mockingly at the musician. Gradually, however, as the note of the guitar grew louder, the mockery faded and the Turkoman watched open mouthed.

Hamar was repeating the same chords—varying them fancifully. The melody was like the tinkling of chimes with an undertone as of heavy temple gongs. It vibrated, caressing the same note, until it seemed to Khlit that the note hung in the air.

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He had never heard the mystical Hindu music and he liked it little. Yet the impression of chimes persisted. Almost he could have sworn that bronze bells were echoing in the air overhead. And still Hamar harped on the vibrant note.

The ring of men was silent. Khlit saw that they were all staring at the goblet, save Chauna Singh and Nur-jahan who were in shadow. And he saw that the water in the glass was stirring, moving up and down.

The melody grew louder. Khlit swore under his breath. For the water was splashing about—although the goblet was steady and the cloth a good yard from Hamar. And then the water began to run down the sides of the vessel, staining the cloth.

It trickled down slowly, while the Turkoman's men drew back. One or two started away from the fire, staring at the cloth in fear. Even Bator Khan got to his feet and stepped back a pace.

The tune of Hamar ceased. And the water in the goblet was still.

"Hide the devil!" swore the Turkoman. "It was a trick."

Hamar opened his eyes and smiled. Khlit saw him cast a half-glance behind him.

"Lift the cloth, then, O one-of-small-faith," said the minstrel. "How could it be a trick?"

Bator Khan did so, hesitantly. The whole of the scarf was wet through. But the goblet was still full to the brim. Hamar regarded him smilingly.

Khlit rose, intending to speak to Chauna Singh. He grunted in surprize. The Rájput and the girl were gone.

VII

THEY did not return to the caravanserai. Bator Khan, apparently in an ill humor, left the Cossack and Hamar to themselves. They spent the night in the enclosure. The dawn was yet cold in the sky the next day when Hamar roused Khlit and the two saddled their horses and rode from the place.

"It was agreed," explained the minstrel, "that if we separated I was to meet the Rájput and Nur-jahan at a certain tavern in Khoten. They must have ridden during the night and will be there ahead of us."

Khlit spurred his horse.

"Hey, minstrel!" he cried. "That was a rare trick you played the Turkoman."

Hamar's brow darkened.

"Call you that a trick? Dullard of the steppe! One without wisdom! Is my art like to a conjurer's mummery? I will teach you otherwise." His frown lighten'ed, "Nay, Khlit, you know not our art. 'Tis true I played but to draw the attention of yonder fools while Nur-jahan slipped away. But as for the music——"

He smiled again, the sad, almost bitter smile that was the habit of the man. For the rest of the day they rode in silence. Khlit's thoughts turned on the man beside him.

Hamar perplexed him. Apparently a Hindu, the minstrel was familiar with the Moslem faith, a deep thinker, an ascetic. Khlit seldom saw him eat, and then only sparingly. His faded eyes, blank almost as those of a blind man, were masks for his thoughts. Khlit had not seen his like before.

At Khoten—a nest of hovels where four caravan routes met and crossed, yet some palaces and temples and a teeming population of every race—Hamar avoided the central squares and led Khlit down a by-street to a low structure of sun-dried clay.

It was already evening, and they found the tavern half-filled with dirty camel drivers and some ill-favored merchants. Slaves were quartered in the courtyard with the horses.

Hamar left Khlit seated over a beaker of rank wine and a joint of meat, to seek out Chauna Singh and his charge. The Cossack beckoned the tavern-keeper—a silk-clad Chinaman.

"Hey, moon-face," he growled, "who is the master of this town?"

"May it please the illustrious khan," bowed the man, speaking in the Tatar tongue, as Khlit had done, "who has sullied his boots by entering my insignificant house—the city of Khoten is free of august authority, save for the Heaven-appointed folk of the temples."

"And what manner of scum are they?"

"Doubtless the illustrious khan has heard of the never-to-be-profaned Buddha and the many sects of the mountains, who are called the priests of the black hats. He may see for himself, for within two days there is the festival of Bon."

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"A festival? Then there will be feasting in the streets of Khoten?"

The innkeeper, arms crossed in his wide sleeves, became silent. The Cossack, with a swift glance, threw a piece of gold on the board from his wallet. His host caught it up, thrusting it into a sleeve. The slant eyes scanned the room cautiously and he leaned nearer.

"May the liberal khan be blessed with many children and great honor. Lo Ch'un has kept his dirty house in Khoten for twice ten years, but he has not seen the rites of the august black hats—the *bonpas*. They are divine secrets. Yet it has been whispered by those loose of tongue that the masked slaves of Buddha sacrifice to their altars on the year of the Rat."

Khlit nodded impatiently. He, also, had heard tales of the Khoten temples and those of the mountains but had set them down as idly spoken. Nevertheless, he had had reason to know the power of the Buddhist sects in Central Asia—different from the mild religion of the Chinese, and little better than demon worship.

Lo Ch'un continued with the same caution:

"It is not well to speak of such things, illustrious warrior, and my fear is greater than my yearning to be of service. But—" a craft smile distorted his features—"I know what may be of value to you——"

Khlit laid another gold-piece on the table, and Lo Ch'un appropriated it with a claw-like hand, his bleared eyes gleaming covetously.

"Servants of Bon, the Destroyer, have arrived from Ladak and Ind and entered the Khoten temples. Men say they have censored the priests here for indolence in serving the faith. There are many black hats in the town and they have insolently—nay, augustly—made search of the caravans and taverns. They bear scowling brows. Harken, noble khan, to a word of wisdom from the lowly Lo Ch'un."

The tavern keeper bent his evil smelling mouth close to the Cossack.

"The Khirghis and Usbek merchants and tribesmen are leaving Khoten before the festival of Bon. It would be well to go hence—say not that I have spoken thus!"

Khlit nodded indifferently. He had neither fear nor respect for the mummery of the priesthoods that influenced the borderland of China. Interpreting what Lo Ch'un had said in the light of Hamar's story, he guessed that the *bonpas* from over the mountains had been messengers of the sect bearing news of Nur-jahan. It was possible. And possible, also, that the Turkoman Bator Khan had been one of the slaves of the black hats.

Frequently, he knew, the priesthood controlled tribesmen through the bondage of fear.

A woman peered between the curtains of the further side of the room, her sallow cheeks crimson with paint, and faded flowers in her hair. She beckoned silently to Lo Ch'un, who pad-padded to her side. For a moment the two talked. Khlit drew out his pipe and scanty stock of tobacco. He began to wonder where Hamar had disappeared to.

When Lo Ch'un came to remove the joint of meat, Khlit stayed him.

"A word, moon-face," he growled. "Know you aught of the Turkoman merchant Bator Khan? Does he come often to Khoten?"

"I know not, honorable khan."

"Well, devil take you—do the caravan merchants stop here?"

"If it is their noble will."

"How dress these precious masked servants of Bon?"

"How should I know, honorable warrior?"

Khlit stared at Lo Ch'un, scowling. A change had come over the wrinkled face of the Chinaman. All expression had faded from his half-shut eyes. His voice was smooth as before, but less assured.

It was clear to the Cossack that his host regretted his speech of a moment ago. Wherefore? Perhaps the woman at the curtain had warned Lo Ch'un. Perhaps it was the mention of Bator Khan.

Khlit rose and grasped the shoulder of Lo Ch'un.

"Harken, keeper of a dirty house," he whispered. "I shall stay in Khoten. If I meet with ill treatment from those you call the black hats, I shall have a tale to tell them of a loose tongued Lo Ch'un. Meditate upon that. The priests like not to have their secrets talked of."

The dim eyes of the tavern-keeper widened slightly and he licked his lips. With a sudden motion he shook himself from the Cossack and vanished behind the curtain.

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VIII

KHLIT smiled to himself, well pleased. If Lo Ch'un was actually under the *kang* of the priests, the man might tell them that Khlit purposed to remain in Khoten. Which would be well, considering that the Cossack doubted not Hamar planned to be on his way shortly.

Doubtless the three fugitives had stopped at Khoten but for provisions. Khlit turned this over in his mind. If he had been in Chauna Singh's place he would have sent one man in for the food and remained without the town. Surely it was dangerous for Nur-jahan here.

But then, he reasoned, Chauna Singh —shrewd in fighting—was a blunt man, of few brains. On the other hand, Hamar should have known better than to come to Khoten. Well, after all, the crafty minstrel had been obliged to follow the other two. He had had no chance, owing to the intrusion of Bator Khan, to confer with them before they left the caravanserai.

Where was Hamar? Had he found the other two? What was keeping him?

Khlit yawned, for he was sleepy. It would not do for him to fall asleep here in the house of Lo Ch'un. He determined to go forth and seek the minstrel.

As the Cossack pushed through the door, he saw, from the corner of his eye, a man rise from a table and follow. Khlit continued on his way, but once in the shadows beside the door frame—darkness had fallen on the town—he drew back against the wall. Experience had taught him it was not well to let another come after him from a place where were many enemies.

No sooner had he done so than another appeared in the doorway, peering into the dark street. Light shone on him from within and his features struck Khlit as familiar. It was a surly rascal in tattered garments—one of the men of Bator Khan.

The fellow looked up and down the street, muttering to himself. He did not see the Cossack in the deep shadows beside him. Then he stepped forward into the gloom at a quick pace. It was clear to Khlit that the man was seeking to follow him and angered at having missed him.

Khlit wasted no time in slipping after the camel-driver. Two could play at that simple game, and if the other was interested in him he might do well to observe whither the man went.

The Cossack's keen brain was active as he pressed after the hurrying servant, keeping in the deep shadows of the low buildings. There was no moon, but occasional gleams from doorways served to reveal his guide.

Bator Khan must have arrived in Khoten. Moreover Khlit and Hamar had been traced to the tavern. How? Well, it mattered not. But Bator Khan alone could not have located them so speedily. Others must have given him information.

Here were tidings for Hamar and Chauna Singh when he met them. Khlit grinned to himself. The Rájput and the minstrel had shown little liking for his advice. Let them lie in the bed they had made for themselves! But there was the girl, Nur-jahan—aye, Nur-jahan.

Khlit paused. From a lighted door had come a fellow who spoke to the camel-driver. The two whispered together. At once the man he was following turned aside down an alley.

The Cossack did not hesitate. Freeing a pistol in his belt, he made after the man. Boldness was Khlit's policy in any hazard. He had learned that it paid best to be on the move when there was danger afoot and leave indecision to his enemies.

Gloom was thick in the alley, and thick also the stench of decayed meat, fish oil, and dirt that filled it. The man ahead was running now, which was fortunate, for Khlit traced him by ear, trotting as lightly as his heavy boots permitted.

Down the alley into another the two passed; from thence to a wide square—evidently a bazaar—where crowds loitered. The light was better here and the Cossack kept his man in sight until both halted before the shadowy pile of a massive building.

Khlit scanned the bulk of the place in the gloom. He made out a stone structure, windows unlit, a dim lantern over the postern door where his companion knocked.

A small panel opened in the upper half of the door and the camel-driver was subjected to a long inspection. Whispered words passed between him and the person within. Whereupon the door swung open, the servant passed inside and a tall form in mail and a black cloak appeared.

It was a spearman, helmeted and grim of

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visage. He yawned sleepily, leaning on the haft of his weapon.

So, Khlit thought, the place—whatever it might be—was guarded. A building of that size could only be a temple or palace. And it had not the look of the latter. Khlit yearned to see what was within. The spearman did not look overshrewd.

The Cossack had learned that it was easier to get out of a building than to get in—easier sometimes than to find a place of safety elsewhere among many enemies. Still, it would hardly do to use violence on the spearman. He might have comrades within.

Khlit swaggered up to the man.

"Bator Khan sends me," he said briefly in Uigur. "A message for those within."

He was watching the fellow's face keenly. At a sign of suspicion the Cossack would have turned back. But the bearded countenance was sleepily indifferent.

"It is well," the other growled. "If you see one of the black hats about, bid him send me a relief. The men within must have weighty business on hand, for they hum through the corridors like a swarm of insects. But I must eat and sleep."

Khlit passed him by without reply. He found himself in a low, long hall. At one side was a bare chamber, evidently a guard room, and empty. The Cossack paced the length of the corridor warily. At the end a flight of stone steps led upward.

These he ascended to an ill-lighted hall where two men—Chinamen—sat on benches that ran around the wall. They were dressed as servants, and unarmed. Khlit spoke to them gruffly.

"The man at the gate bids the black hats send him a relief."

One arose at this and Khlit motioned impatiently at the other. Both left the chamber with the submissiveness of the underlings of their race. Khlit judged them little better than slaves.

He was about to go forward, when he paused in his tracks. A strong, clear voice had spoken. Yet Khlit saw that there was no one in the room with him. The voice had seemed but a few paces distant.

Again it came, loud but muffled. Whispers repeated the words from the corners of the chamber, and fainter whispers down the stairs.

A cold tremor touched Khlit's back and he swore under his breath. Was the room filled with men he could not see? What manner of place was this?

Then he realized the cause of the mystery. The room was lofty, of bare stone. The voice came from an adjoining corridor and the echoes of the empty halls carried the sound to where he stood.

IX

GRIM and desolate was the abode of Bon, the Destroyer, in the city of Khoten. Narrow embrasures formed the windows. In the great hall of the temple proper were ranged the fetishes—miniatures of the monstrous idols in the main temple of Bon in the mountains.

In the annals of the ancient city of Khoten it is written that the secrets of Bon were safeguarded jealously. Access to the temple was difficult. Those who came to speak to the *bonpas*—priests—were not allowed to see the face of the man they conversed with. Especially was this true when one of the higher order of the mountain temple visited the Khoten sanctuary.

So a reception room was contrived, artfully designed so that the priest standing behind a curtain in the room would have his words carried to the ears of his visitor by echoes. The visitors stood sometimes in the chamber itself, on the outer side of the curtain, sometimes in the hall at the head of the entrance stairs—according to their degree of intimacy with the *bonpas*.

For the rest, the sanctuary was a place of silence, ill-omened. For the *bonpas* were worshipers not of Buddha or Bráhmâ, but of Bon, the incarnate spirit of power, drawing strength through destruction and death. Thus they were allied to the *tantrik* sect of Kali, the four-armed.

In their halls few men showed their faces. By night men and women were brought into the halls, who left them cringing or laughing aloud, vacantly as those whose minds are disordered.

Bator Khan and his servant being followers of the *bonpas* were admitted to the reception chamber on the night that the Turkoman's caravan came to Khoten.

They stood uneasily before a heavy black curtain which stretched the length of the room. At one end of this curtain was placed a priest of Bon, masked—as was

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their habit during a ceremonial or a visit from their superiors of the mountain temple. This mask was merely a bag-like length of cloth, dropping over the face from the black hat and painted gruesomely to awe those who visited the sanctuary.

The black hat itself consisted of a helmet-like cap of felt—to distinguish the followers of Bon from the yellow hats, who were servants of the Dalai Lama of Lhassa. In addition, the *bonpa* by the curtain held—as sigil of his office—a trumpet of human bone.

"Your message!" he whispered to the two. "He who waits behind the curtain is impatient of delay."

Bator Khan's pig-like face was moist from perspiration.

"I was sent, O favored of Bon," he repeated huskily, "into the desert to seek the woman Nur-jahan. Behold, I was aided by the god, for I came upon them in a caravanserai. They be four—three men, two warriors and the third a wandering musician—and a woman. Surely this is Nur-jahan. I followed the four into Khoten, where I dispatched my men to find their abiding place."

He paused, licking his thick lips. The attendant by the curtain regarded him impassively from the mask.

"This man—" he pointed to the camel-driver— "found Hamar, the minstrel, and the old warrior at the noisesome house of Lo Ch'un. Hamar went forth into the streets and we saw him not, owing to some black sorcery of which the man is master."

There was no response from the voice behind the curtain—naught save the echoes of the Turkoman's hurried words.

"As to Chauna Singh and the woman," continued Bator Khan, "they hide in the slave market. Truly, I do not think that Hamar has seen them yet. This man of mine has kept watch on the one at Lo Ch'un's. That is all, may it please the Presence."

Still there was no response. The camel-driver paled visibly and stared at the curtain. Bator Khan breathed heavily. The grim mask of the attendant leered at them sardonically.

"I found the woman Nur-jahan," protested Bator Khan defensively.

There was the sound of a laugh from the curtain, a sound taken up and passed down the corridor fitfully. The Turkoman shivered slightly.

"Dog of a dog's begetting," he heard, "think you to trick those who serve the gods—with lies? You were sent to find and slay the woman Nur-jahan. Have you done so? Blunderer—braggart—heart-of a-jackal—vermin-of-a-dunghill! The enemies of Bon have clouded your wits. We have heard what passed at the caravanserai."

Bator Khan would have spoken, but the voice went on swiftly.

"In the desert you had the four at your mercy. By a device of the minstrel, Hamar, the woman escaped. You have not seen her since. Speak, is not this the truth?"

The Turkoman gulped and muttered—"Aye."

"What has the camel-driver to say?"

The man started and glanced furtively to the door through which he had come. But a motion of the masked priest brought his gaze to the curtain.

"O exalted-of-the-gods, source-of-divine-wisdom," he chattered, "hear the follower who is less than the dirt beneath the hoofs of your horse. I watched the man Khlit at the tavern. He talked long with Lo Ch'un in a tongue I knew not. So I dispatched word to him by one of the harlots of the place to guard well his tongue. Then, when the tall plainsman left, I followed, and I— I——"

His eyes widened and he lifted hand to mouth as he sought for words.

"And he escaped your sight?"

"Aye—it was dark—a comrade of Bon sent me hither—I did my best!"

The man fell on his knees, raising arms over head.

"Fate has written a seal on your forehead, driver of camels," observed the priest behind the curtain.

"It was dark!" cried the ruffian.

"Is Bon to be served by such as you?" the voice rang out mockingly. "Nay, the god has better servants. Harken, Bator Khan. The day after the morrow is the feast-day of Bon, the Destroyer. You know the rites of the feast-day. The hand of Bon will be stretched over the city, and the god will rise in his strength. He must be worshiped. There will be a sacrifice."

Bator Khan lifted a hand to wipe the moisture from his brow.

"Votaries of the god," cried the voice,

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"will offer their lives. Lo, the home of the god is in the sacred mountains of Himachal, to the south. There is his sanctuary. The votaries will walk, unarmed and afoot, into the mountains, up, over the snow-line. No man—not even a priest of the temple may molest them. They will die in the summits of Himachal. Will you and the carrion that is your man offer yourselves as votaries?"

The echoes growled the words, drawn out into a long sound that was almost a shriek.

"Sacred Himachal is the abode of Mansarowar, the beast Mansarowar. Lo, the mountain abode is the fulfilment of human desires, Bator Khan—and human death. Those who journey up bearing the mark of Bon will not return. Should they come back—if they survived the cold of the summits—to Khoten, the hand of the *bonpas* would slay them, slowly as if they were smitten with leprosy."

The wretched men stared blindly at the black curtain. But when Bator Khan had made as if to speak, the voice went on.

"But you are too miserable an offering for Bon. Live then, for a time—it will not be long. Fate has set its mark on you. Meanwhile, the priest will see that Nur-jahan and her men do not leave the city. When the feast comes, they will be sought out and brought into the crowd of worshippers. There a cry will be raised against them, and they will have heart and bowels torn out by the followers of the god. It will be a pleasing sight. Now, away from here and live—if you can escape the writing of fate."

Whereupon the two turned and ran from the chamber. The masked priest watched them pass into the corridor. Then he moved his head alertly. From the outer hall, below the steps came the clash of weapons and a cry.

The priest hesitated, glancing at the motionless curtain. The ways of the man behind the curtain were sometimes secret and past knowing. Yet he had not known that the two were to be slain as they left. A second clamor, ended by a heavy fall, aroused his suspicions and he ran out into the hall above the stairs. Two frightened servants joined him.

The three descended the stairs and passed into the entrance corridor. There they halted. The bodies of Bator Khan and the camel driver were prone on the stone floor. The mail-clad form of the spearman who had been sentry at the gate sprawled over them on hands and knees. His weapon lay beside him, the point severed from the haft.

The masked priest bent over him as the man sank to the floor, groaning weakly. A thin stream of blood trinkled from his neck.

"Fool!" cried the priest. "Have you slain the Turkoman?"

The other coughed bestially, shaking his head. He was near death.

"Another—a curved sword."

He pointed to the door which was open.

The priest and the servants ran out. In the shadows of the street a tall figure showed for an instant, then vanished.

The masked priest made as if to follow, then hesitated. Three armed men had been struck down in the space of a minute—and he did not follow.

X

KHLIT and Hamar had waited in the ebony and lacquered room over the tavern of Lo Ch'un for the space of a day. The Cossack liked the room little. Tarnished silk covered the walls, and the varied odors of the alley outside, issuing through a circular window, did not relieve the smell of musk which pervaded the place.

Now and then the women of the place—girls of China, Samarkand, with one or two Georgians—peered in through the hangings of the single door but did not linger, seeing who was within. Khlit sat on a bench against the further wall wiping his sword with a fragment of silk and watching the door, while Hamar squatted beside him, tuning his guitar softly.

They had seen nothing of Nur-jahan or Chauna Singh since their arrival in Khoten. Hamar reported that the two must be among the caravans of the slave market.

Evidently, thought Khlit, the girl and the Rajput had been kept from coming to the tavern. That they had not fallen into the hands of the *bonpas* he knew from the talk he had overheard in the temple of Bon. Nur-jahan, he reasoned, had guessed at the peril she faced in the streets of Khoten and had remained in hiding.

The death of the three in the hall of the temple caused him no second thought.

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Not otherwise could he have escaped from the place, and they had had time to draw their weapons.

He had told the minstrel of what passed the night before.

"It is fate." Hamar waved a lean hand, sniffing at a perfume he carried in a flask about his throat. "Higher than the scheming of the servants of the gods, khan, is the unalterable will which brings death to all things. What is to be, will be. What are the gods? Men worship them because they fear them. A dozen priesthoods wax fat on fear. They say there are good deities. How can it be so?"

Khlit fingered the gold cross at his neck.

"This is an evil place, Hamar," he observed. "A city in the waste of a desert—caravans that hold revelry herein—black priests that hold the city in their power. Hey! I have not seen the cross of a church for many Winters."

Hamar glanced at him curiously.

"A church. Nay, are there not temples enough for your liking about here?"

"Does a horse like the meat of a tiger?"

The minstrel fingered his guitar with a sigh. Suddenly Khlit found the man's faded, green eyes peering into his own.

"Yet you like danger, Khlit, khan, and the thrill of clashing swords. Tell me, why did you not heed the warning of Lo Ch'un and leave this place before the feast of tomorrow? What matters Nur-jahan to you? Our lives will be worth little more than the sand of the alley by another sun."

"Bah, minstrel," grunted the Cossack, "shall I ride hence while the woman—mischief-maker though she be—stays? Truly, it will not be easy to escape with whole skins on the morrow. Think you Nur-jahan is still in Khoten?"

Hamar nodded.

"Aye, the Persian is shrewd. Doubtless she has learned of the watch the *bonpas* keep on the place. If there be a way hence, she will find it."

He glanced again at Khlit thoughtfully.

"It is written that a diamond shines from a heap of dirt. Nay, khan, the woman reaches out to the rule of an empire with her small hand. She will have great honor—or death. And the issue lies on the dice of fate. Harken, khan. Sher Afghan, the husband of Nur-jahan, still lives. Chauna Singh is faithful to him. What if Sher Afghan is slain by Jahangir, the Mogul?"

"Then Nur-jahan will be free."

"But Chauna Singh? Since the name of Ind has been, a Rájput is faithful to his lord."

Khlit made no response. But he did not forget the words of Hamar.

The circle of the window darkened. Twilight was casting its veil over the city. From somewhere came the sunset cries of a *mullah*. Hamar rose and, striking flint on stone, lit a candle. In an adjoining room Khlit heard the wailing of a woman in grief. The sound had persisted for some time.

Hamar had paid no attention to it. Men were thronging into the place from the street, and the room below was a tumult of a score of tongues. Still the wail went on, shrill and dismal.

With an oath the Cossack sprang up and pushed through the curtains. Following the sound of the crying woman, he came to another chamber like the one he had left. Within he saw a carpet spread, and on the carpet a man.

Beside him kneeled the woman who had beckoned Lo Ch'un from the tavern the night before. Her hair was disordered in grief and the stain on her cheeks showed vivid against a pallid skin. She raised inflamed eyes to the Cossack.

What drew Khlit's gaze and brought a second oath to his lips was the sight of a *bonpa* mask placed over the face of the man on the rug. It was the first that Khlit had seen, but he did not mistake it.

"Hide of the devil!" he muttered, for the painted fabric leered at him grotesquely.

Something in the loose position of the man's limbs and his dirty silk tunic aroused his suspicions.

Stepping over the prostrate form, Khlit lifted the black mask. The distorted face of Lo Ch'un stared up at him, eyes distended and flesh purple. It needed no examination to show that Lo Ch'un had been dead for some time—and Khlit remembered the long wailing of the woman.

"How was this done?" he asked the woman.

She shook her head mutely, not understanding what he said. Khlit perceived the end of a silken cord hanging from Lo Ch'un's mouth. The cord, he saw, was attached to a gag which had been forced far down the tavern keeper's throat.

Khlit flung the mask into a corner and turned from the room. Hamar looked up questioningly as he entered.

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"Hey, minstrel," grinned Khlit, "there is a notable physician in the temple of the *bonpas* who has devised a cure for tongue-wagging. Doubtless—after the tidings brought to the temple by the man of Bator Khan—the priests thought he was too free with their secrets."

"A fool has paid for his folly."

KHLIT reflected moodily that Lo Ch'un had been slain in a room adjoining theirs without the sound of a struggle. They must have been within a score of feet when it was done. Yet they had not been molested. He scowled as he thought how the hand of the priests was everywhere in Khoten. Doubtless the men in the temple knew where they—Hamar and Khlit were—and, knowing, waited. For what? For the feast of the morrow, when the death of Nur-jahan was planned?

The words of Hamar returned to his memory. They were four against many, and their foes were not to be seen.

"Devil take it all!" he grumbled, for the thing was preying on his nerves somewhat. "Let us go below and eat, minstrel. Thus we will have a full meal under our belts. And it will be better so."

"I will not eat," said Hamar, "but I will go with you. If the *bonpas* have marked Nur-jahan's death for the morrow we have little to fear tonight."

With that the two descended to the tavern.

Unwatched by Lo Ch'un, a motley crowd was drinking and gorging at will. The women of the house were scattered among the benches, aiding the merriment with shrill laughter. Some looked up drunkenly at his entrance.

"Fill yourselves, dogs," muttered Khlit, "there will be none to tally the drinks——"

He broke off abruptly and clutched Hamar's arm. Among a crowd of men across the men he caught the veiled figure of Nur-jahan, with bearded Chauna Singh towering at her side.

"Here be our comrades, minstrel," he whispered. Hamar thrust his way through the crowd.

Then, as they approached the girl, she dropped her veil and smiled at them. Khlit heard Hamar draw in his breath in sharp surprize. Truly, it was a strange thing, for Nur-jahan was a Mohammedan and it was forbidden to such to show their faces before the eyes of strange men.

Chauna Singh flushed angrily, for Nur-jahan was wife to his lord, Sher Afghan, and it was not fitting that she should be seen by the drunken men of the brothel. He made as if to clutch her veil, but she stayed him with a whisper, speaking softly to Hamar also.

"Is the girl mad?" growled Khlit to the minstrel. "She hides herself for a day and two nights. Then, lo, she shows herself to these cattle. Look yonder!"

Hamar looked and saw the eyes of the men in the room turn to Nur-jahan and stare hotly. The girl's beauty stood out among the miserable women of the place in sharp contrast. A silence fell on the tavern.

Men pushed wine cups away from lips and gazed at Nur-jahan narrow-eyed. Bearded hillmen muttered to themselves. A sheepskin clad giant rose unsteadily, his pock-marked face flushed with drink, and lurched forward, grinning.

The fitful light of the place—from candle and hearth—gave the dark countenance of the girl a witchery that stirred the pulses of those who watched.

"She says," the minstrel whispered to Khlit, "that she wishes these dogs to see her beauty, that they may know her tomorrow."

"They seem little disposed to wait until the morrow, Hamar," said Khlit grimly.

He sensed trouble in the air, for the men were pressing closer. The Khirghiz giant planted himself in front of Nur-jahan, his small eyes a-light.

"Ho, comrades!" he bellowed. "A dainty morsel is here. By the bones of Satan, this is a face to delight the gods!"

Khlit moved closer to Chauna Singh. He was angry at Nur-jahan's prank. Not content with the enemity of the priests, the girl had dared the lawless crew of the tavern. She smiled at them coldly. And some who stared at her moved uneasily under her glance. Here, they thought, was no common courtesan. What manner of woman was she?

Thus it happened that while some pushed forward with silent intentness, others hung back, measuring the stature of Chauna Singh and Khlit and the bearing of the girl.

"Drink, men of the caravan trails!" cried the girl in her clear, commanding voice. "It is written that wine is the sweeper-away-of-care! Give them wine," she ordered the slaves. "Tomorrow they

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will see that which they will tell their children, and it will be a tale of many moons. Ha! Life is sweet when such deeds are in the air."

Her cry pleased many of the watchers and they roared approval.

"Lo Ch'un is dead—there be none to guard the wine!" cried one.

Over their heads Khlit could hear the faint wailing of the woman by the body. He glanced at Nur-jahan curiously. Mad the girl might be, but she was fearless.

Then silence fell again as the Khirghiz drunkard stretched out a heavy hand toward Nur-jahan. She drew back swiftly and touched Chauna Singh on the arm.

"Strike this dog," she cried softly, "but do not slay him."

At the words the scimitar of the Rájput flashed in front of her. No time had the Khirghiz to draw weapon. Khlit saw the scimitar turn deftly and smite the forehead of the man with the flat of the blade.

The knees of the Khirghiz bent under him and his bulk dropped heavily to the floor.

"He was a fool!" cried Nur-jahan aloud. "Harken, men of the desert, I am she who is called Nur-jahan, Light of the Palace. Look well, for you may not see my face again. I go from Khoten tomorrow, at the feast of Bon. Come to the feast, for there will be a sight worth seeing."

With that she turned swiftly and disappeared up the stairs. Chauna Singh followed with a black glance at the gaping crowd. Khlit watched until he was sure none of the caravan men would molest them further. Gradually they returned to their cups and their talk.

Khlit sought and found the joint of meat he had come for. Hamar had gone, and he ate alone, being hungry. His thoughts turned on the whim of Nur-jahan. She had shown her face to these men wilfully. They were, without doubt, devotees of Bon. Surely Nur-jahan had a reason for what she did.

What was it? At that time Khlit did not know.

XI

THE midday sun was hot over Khoten's hovels and temples on the noon appointed as the feast of Bon. From the taverns and caravanserais issued a motley crowd—thin-boned Arabs, squat Khirghiz hillmen, hawk-faced Usbeks—a smattering of Hindus, cleanly robed.

And as they pressed into the streets leading to the temple of Bon, there came the low thrumming of stone drums beaten within the building.

The sound of the drums passed through the sand-swept alleys, out beyond the groves of wild poplars, leaves a-droop from lack of wind—out to the shimmering waste of the desert of Gobi to the north and the level plain that led to the mountains of the south.

Dimly in the heat haze these mountains were to be seen—gleaming snow summits flashing into the blue of the sky. The narrow embrasures of the temple looked out upon the hills. Men whispered to each other that the fetishes of the sanctuary faced toward the mountains, where was the home of the god Bon.

About the temple courtyard a throng was gathered, pushing and elbowing for a sight of the cleared space before the gate of the structure. A group of bearers set down the palanquin of a Chinese mandarin and escorted the stout silk-clad and crimson tulip-embroidered person of their master through the onlookers, striking aside those who stood in their way with their wands.

A continuous hubbub swelled over the monotone of the drums. By now half the men and women of the city were in the square before the temple—sleepy-eyed and quarrelsome from the revelry of the night before.

Bands of the black hats were passing through the streets. They were pale men, evil-eyed and complacent. Merchants who like them little still journeyed to the square, for it paid to be friendly with the folk of the black hat on the feast-day of Bon. Votaries of the god went eagerly, driven by the blood-lust which yearned to see certain of their fellows marked for death.

In the throng were those who had come to Khoten with Nur-jahan—Chauna Singh, watchful and silent, disdainful of the multitude of low-caste—Hamar walking as if in a trance—Khlit, apparently oblivious of what passed, but inwardly observant.

The Cossack was ill-pleased with their position. He had seen enough of the handwork of the *bonpas* to know that their lives were put to the hazard. Bator Khan was dead; but other servants of the priests, he knew, were not lacking. Any Arab or

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Khirghiz in the throng might be the bearer of a knife destined for them.

A crowd always disturbed the Cossack of the Curved Saber. Here there was no room for sword-play—no chance to set a horse to gallop and meet an enemy as he liked to do. He put little faith in his pistols.

Left to himself, Khlit would have ventured on a dash from the city, mounted on his pony. But the party of Nur-jahan was certainly shadowed by the priests—after the scenes in the tavern the night before there would be small difficulty in that.

So long, however, as Chauna Singh and Hamar remained with the girl, he was grimly resolved to see the matter through. He would not let the Rájput say that he had drawn back from danger.

"Give way, O born-of-a-dog and soul-of-swine!" snarled the Rájput at those in front as he drew Nur-jahan forward.

Hamar and Khlit pressed after them.

Oaths and threats greeted their progress. But here and there were men who had been in the tavern the evening before and these whispered to their neighbors, so that many turned to look after the girl. In this way they pushed to the first rank of watchers in the temple courtyard.

The crowd was already stirred by the ceremony of the priests. Khlit saw men staring, rigid-eyed, and others muttering fragments of prayers. The throb of the drums beat into his ears.

"It grows time for the servants of Bon to speak to us," he heard a Dungan say. "The dance is near its ending."

For the first time he had sight of what was going on in front of the temple.

An array of the black hats was sounding long trumpets, echoing the note of the drums—an insistent clamor that harped upon one note insidiously. Before them whirled and tossed a throng of the masked priests. In the center of the dances was the form of a woman, bare of clothing to the waist and streaked with blood.

Khlit watched the scene indifferently. It was evil mummery, this prostrating before a hidden god. Almost he laughed at panting priests in their painted masks. But, hearing the beat of the drums, he kept silence.

And, as at a signal from within the temple, the dancers ceased, flinging themselves on the ground.

A voice issued from the dark gateway of the temple, a voice measured and calm.

"On the summits of Himachal," it said, "is the abode of Bon, the Destroyer. There is the seat of happiness, the shrine of the ages. In the silence of the mountains the avalanches reveal the anger and power of the gods."

"Himachal!" the shout was taken up by the crowd. "In Himachal is life and the blessed death!"

Khlit caught Chauna Singh's eye and smiled without merriment.

"Has Nur-jahan come hither to be slain easily, as a white dove is caught by a falcon?" he growled.

Chauna Singh shook his head moodily.

"Nay, khan, I know not. It was her will to come. The city is guarded and we may not escape. But here is an evil place. Yet would she come, saying that we might yet live. Could I do otherwise? I am her man."

"Does she hope to awe these carrion with the name of Jahangir?"

"Nay," the Rájput grunted distastefully. "The Mogul is a stripling—and his power is distant."

"Then, what will we do?"

"Watch!"

"Aye—but not for long." Khlit motioned over his shoulder. Men of the black hats were edging through the crowd. "Look yonder."

"I see." Chauna Singh turned his back deliberately. "Nur-jahan has ordered that where she goes we must follow. Mark that, khan."

The voice within the temple rose to a hoarse cry. Khlit understood little of what it said, but the crowd surged excitedly.

"And the way to the hills is open," he heard. "Whoever offers his life to Bon—be he slave or khan—he will be put upon the path that leads past the shrine of Kedernath, by the lake of Lamdok Tso, to the home of the gods——"

A man sprang forward from the throng and cast himself in the sand before the woman.

"A sacrifice!" the gathering roared. "A life given to Bon."

Khlit saw the priests go to the man and take his weapons from his belt. Then he was led within the temple.

The Cossack snarled at the sight. Devil-work, he thought. The impulse to cast

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away life in religious frenzy was bred in the blood of the men around him.

Nur-jahan's hand clutched him swiftly.

"Come," he heard her whisper. "In this way we may win free!"

He caught at his sword-hilt, for the black hats about him had pressed closer. Nur-jahan's words had set him to thinking swiftly. He saw the girl, followed by her companions, step from the crowd.

Khlit stooped in the throng for a moment. Then he sprang erect and leaped after the others.

Nur-jahan's silvery voice came to his ears. The girl was standing among the priests before the gate of the temple.

"A sacrifice to Bon," she called clearly. "I, Nur-jahan the fair, offer myself to go into the mountains."

He saw Hamar's sensitive face pale and Chauna Singh scowl, as he joined them. The priests stared at them from their masks. A roar broke from the crowd.

"It is Nur-jahan!" he heard. "She of the tavern! Here is a fitting one to wander into the snows!"

The cries were taken up by others, stirred by zeal. Khlit wondered if it was for this that the girl had shown herself in the tavern. As he wondered, he was caught by the priests.

"To Himachal!" the crowd roared, as the black hats hesitated, glancing at the gate. "We will see them put afoot and weaponless at the foot of the holy hills. Let the men accompany her. Ho—she will be well attended in death!"

The eyes of the crowd were fixed in the black gate of the temple where was the hidden priest of Bon. A brief silence. Then:

"Let Nur-jahan be the sacrifice! Let the gods have the flower of the Moghul! We will see her put afoot in the hills, in the snows! None may molest her—she belongs to the gods!"

It was the cry of the camel-men who had seen the beauty of the girl the night before.

The shout was taken up by the multitude. The priests stepped forward and seized the four. At this there was a roar of approval.

"Bon has taken the woman!" shrieked a man. "Her limbs will wither in the snows!"

Khlit saw the girl poised proudly among the black priests, veiled head high. He saw Chauna Singh's scimitar snatched from him and felt his own pistols jerked from his belt. His scabbard hung empty at his side.

"To the camels!" cried the crowd.

They were led by the *bonpas* to the waiting beasts. They were not molested, for it was the law of the priesthood that the sacrifices were inviolate from harm by human hands.

Nur-jahan was cast upon the back of a kneeling camel. Khlit and the others followed her. At the eager urging of the throng, the beasts, surrounded by mounted priests and their followers, were put into motion away from the temple, to the south.

A black cloth was cast over Khlit's head and made fast.

For the rest of that day and the night the camels did not slacken their pace. The next day many hands drew Khlit from the beast and mounted him upon a horse.

They rode forward again—and upward. Still upward. The warmth of the foot-hills gave place to the chill of the mountain slope.

XII

All things that die on Himachal, and dying think of his snows, are blessed.

In a hundred ages of the gods the glories of Himachal could not be told. Of Himachal, where Shiva lived and the Ganges falls from the foot of Vishnu like the slender thread of a lotus flower.

Paradise is to be found on Himachal—even by the beast that bears the name of Mansarowar.

Hymn to Himachal.

THE shadows of the mountain slope were deepening, and the wind that whispered down the pass was cold. Gaunt pine trees reared overhead. Miles below, the level glow of the setting sun was still on the plain.

Silence reigned in the forest—a silence broken only by the fitful brush of pine branches, one against the other. The snow that had glittered up the pass was a dull gray. In the distance, to right and left, massive peaks reared their heads, and their snow crests caught the last glimmer of the sun.

Standing in the ravine, Nur-jahan and her companions watched a cavalcade move out on the plain. The tiny figures progressed slowly across the brown expanse, horse and camel barely to be distinguished at that distance. Light glinted from the pin-point of a spear or sword.

Then, as if by magic, the sun passed from the plain. The cavalcade vanished in the shadows.

Nur-jahan turned to the men.

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"With Allah are the keys of the unseen," she said softly. "Yonder go the priests of Bon. Here we be, cast upon the mountain. What say you?"

Chauna Singh brushed his hand across his eyes. Long muffled in a cloth, the watching had strained his good eye.

"Nay, *mir*," he said slowly. "In my mind there is a thought. It is that the evil dogs have left some of their breed to spy upon us here."

Hamar roused himself from his reverie.

"The Rájput speaks truth, Nur-jahan," he assented meditatively. "The servants of Bon are accustomed to keep watch upon the men they cast out to die. If we turn back, our heads will be cut from our shoulders and sent to the Khoten temple. We have offered ourselves as sacrifices. We must go forward."

"To what?" snarled Chauna Singh. "Over our heads is the snow. It would be the work of four days to pass the peaks, by way of the lake of Lamdok Tso, to the further side—four days for strong men, with food and weapons. Nur-jahan is a woman—and we have not eaten since sunrise."

"Nay, more, Chauna Singh," laughed the girl. "Your weapons are in the hands of the *bonpas*, who have taken our horses. Recall the word of the priest who said our way lies onward, or death awaits us."

"It was your will, Nur-jahan," observed Hamar, "that we should do this. Wherefore?"

"Blind!" mocked the girl. "Allah has given you the gift of song, yet you are but a dreamer. Nay, we could not stand in Khoten. The knives of the black priests were already drawn for our slaying when I came forward from the crowd."

"A swift death is better than to be food for rooks," muttered Chauna Singh.

"Yet Sher Afghan gave you charge over me—to safeguard my life."

"Aye, Nur-jahan—it is so." Chauna Singh bent his head calmly. "And as I have promised, I will do."

"It is written," sighed the minstrel, "that death among friends is like to a feast."

"And it is also written," said the girl, "that Allah knows what is before us. Allah weakens the stratagems of misbelievers—and beyond the summits lies Kashmir."

She turned swiftly on Khlit, who had been moodily silent.

"What say you, old warrior?"

The Cossack stretched his big frame.

"I?" He laughed low. "I thirst to have yonder carrion priests at my sword's end."

"Ho, old khan, you are not faint of heart." She skipped from his side up the pass a pace. "Come, Hamar, Chauna Singh. Time passes and we must press on. We will see the heights where the god Bon dwells. Come, are you beasts of burden, to be whipped? Lead, Chauna Singh. I will follow with the khan."

The Rájput strode into the twilight without further word. Hamar accompanied him as best he could. The girl drew her *khalat* about her and followed, motioning Khlit to her side.

The sides of the gorge frowned down on them. There was no trail, the pass being rocky. The Cossack wondered if men hidden in the pines were watching them. The girl touched his arm.

"Harken, khan," she whispered. "Know you where we are?"

Khlit shook his head. The mountains were strange to him.

"We be below the Lake of Lamdok Tso, the blue lake. Here is where the votaries are led from Khoten in the evil ceremonies of the black priests. By the lake of Lamdok Tso runs the pass of Kandrum, which leads from Kashmir. Hither we came to Khoten. There is no refuge for us in the pass—but at Lamdok Tso a man awaits us."

As Khlit was silent, she continued.

"Hamar came from Agra with the message from Jahangir, the Mogul—" she lingered on the name softly—"to hasten back to him. Chosen warriors of his are posted near to Leh to meet us. But Hamar fell in with a man of Sher Afghan in the outskirts of the town of Leh. The fellow said that Sher Afghan, the Lion-Slayer, would send a message to Chauna Singh—and to me."

"Where is this Lion-Slayer of yours?" grunted Khlit. "Will he not aid you against the devil priests?"

"Nay, you know not our people, khan." In the gloom he saw her smile. "My lord is proud—and I have fled from his side. I love him not—how may it be, when I was betrothed to Jahangir? After my flight with Chauna Singh Sher Afghan would not lift a hand to aid me."

"Yet he sent the Rájput."

"Aye." The dark head tossed proudly. "I am honored of many men. Chauna Singh lives but to serve me—and Sher

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Afghan. He rode after me from the camp of my lord, saying that Sher Afghan had said that I should not go unattended. It is well."

Khlit was silent, turning the matter over in his mind. Verily, these were strange folk, proud and swift to act. Their love was as quick as their hatred.

"Hamar said to the man of Sher Afghan," continued the girl, "that if his lord would send a message, it might be dispatched to the Lake of Lamdok Tso, in the Kandrum Pass—for we must return by the pass to Kashmir. Now, when Hamar, riding but slowly, for he has a weak body, passed the trail by the border of the lake, he found the messenger already there. Sher Afghan had sent word swiftly."

"That was the time of one moon agone," observed Khlit.

"If it were a hundred days the man would still be there. And if we can gain the Kandrum trail, by the lake, we will find him—with food and a horse."

"Aye, food," growled the Cossack, who had already tightened his belt.

"Does Chauna Singh know this?" he asked after a while.

"Nay, why not?" said the girl lightly. Khlit glanced at her but could not see her face in the dim light. "Say not I have told you, khan," she added.

"In the mountains such as these," he meditated, "a man must carry food with him, for there is little game to be had. Either food—or a bringer of meat."

He halted, despite the girl's impatient exclamation.

"Go you with Chauna Singh," he continued. "I will follow—presently."

"May Allah the merciful forgive me!" cried Nur-jahan. "It is the hour of sunset prayer."

With a deft movement she undid the white veil from her head and spread it on the earth at her feet. Khlit fumbled under his heavy sheepskin coat. Nur-jahan saw that he drew forth something that gleamed whitely in the twilight. Seeing it, she caught her breath.

"How came that here, khan?"

"Hey, little song-bird," the Cossack laughed, "where else than beneath the tail of my coat? Think you the men of Bon could rid me of this?"

He swung his curved sword viciously about his head.

"It is good to feel it thus. Nay, I slipped it from scabbard in the throng in front of the temple and none saw it done."

"Whither go you?" whispered Nur-jahan, for Khlit had turned away.

"To see if the servants of the black priests follow us," he growled. "If it is so, then we may have food. If I come not back within an hour, go you ahead with the two."

Nur-jahan watched his tall figure fade into the gloom down the ravine. She called softly to Chauna Singh to linger and sank to her knees on the white veil, facing, as was the law, toward Mecca.

There was no cry of the muezzin to accompany her prayer. Nothing except the rising drone of wind in the tree-tops overhead, where the crests of the pines swayed and lifted.

When she completed her prayer she arose and joined her waiting companions, drawing the *khalat* close about her slender form, for the night wind was cold. Briefly she told the Rájput whither Khlit had gone. They watched the ravine to the rear, while darkness merged the outlines of tree and boulder. Stars twinkled out over their heads.

Chauna Singh was stirring impatiently when a form appeared beside them and they heard the Cossack's boots grating in the stones.

When he came nearer they made out that he held something in his hand, something bulky, that moved of its own accord. Chauna Singh bent closer. Then he stretched out his hand and touched what was on Khlit's arm.

"A bird!" whispered the minstrel.

"Nay," corrected the Rájput. "A falcon—a goshawk, unless I mistake its head. Whence came this, khan?"

"A rider of the black priests held it on his wrist, Chauna Singh. Lo, here is a getter of meat—if there be game hereabouts." He stroked the hooded and shackled bird, which clung to the gauntlet. "The men of Bon follow us—but they know not one of their number is missing. The horse escaped me. The man lies back among the rocks."

XIII

DAWN flooded into the gorge as the sun gleamed on the snow peaks overhead.

There was no mist as in the valleys of the foot-hills, yet the sun was long in dispelling

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the chill that clung to the rocks. The faces of the four were dark with chilled blood. Nevertheless, the light brought a certain amount of cheer.

They felt the brief exhilaration of those who have watched through the night and feel the first warmth of the day in their veins. They had been stumbling ahead for the last few hours, making little progress, but Chauna Singh and Khlit had forbidden a halt. Sleep came with rest, and the two warriors knew that sleep, on stomachs long empty, lowered the vitality.

There were circles under Nur-jahan's fine eyes and her little feet limped in their leather slippers. Hamar's wrinkled face was a shade thinner. Of the four, he missed the absence of food the least, owing to his ascetic habits.

Khlit and Chauna Singh showed no trace of hardship so far. The night's march meant little to them and they were saving their strength with the experience of men accustomed to the hazards of forced journeys.

"We have not gone far, khan," muttered the Rájput.

Khlit cast a keen glance above and below. They were still in the forest belt, with the snow-line a bit nearer. He understood now why they had been placed in the ravine by the priests of Bon. The rock sides of the gorge were sheer. And impassable. They must go forward, or back.

And the men below would see that they did not go back.

"Hamar says," went on Chauna Singh, "that the pass leads up over the snow-line to the valley of the blue lake—Lamdok Tso. It is pleasing to Bon, the Destroyer, that his victims perish near the blue lake."

"One has perished already," laughed Khlit grimly.

"May he be born for a thousand years in the bodies of foul toads!" amended the Rájput. "Harken, khan. Let us loose the falcon. Soon we shall be above the place where game is to be found."

"Presently. Nur-jahan must press ahead now. When she tires we will unhood the goshawk." Khlit tightened the shackles of the sulking bird. "We have a greater enemy than hunger."

"Cold," assented Chauna Singh. His glance lingered on the form of the woman ahead of them. "So be it, khan."

They advanced up the defile steadily. Khlit, although he watched closely, saw no sign of those who were following. They had fallen back, he reasoned, trusting to the gorge to keep the four pent in.

So far they had advanced for a night and the part of a day. Nur-jahan had told him that the lake of Lamdok Tso lay a journey of two nights, two days and part of a third night from their starting-point. And they still had the snow to face.

Khlit thought grimly that if the goshawk failed them it would go ill with the four. Yet he saw no chance of turning back. News of their venture would have spread through the foot-hills, and even if they succeeded in avoiding the guardians of the pass to their rear they would have no place of refuge to seek.

His talk with Chauna Singh convinced him that the Rájput did not know of the man awaiting them at the lake, in the Kandrum pass. Nur-jahan, then, had not told her follower what she had whispered to Khlit. Hamar knew.

The minstrel, his *vina* slung across his shoulders, kept pace with them silently. Like most men of small frame, once the first weariness had passed off, his limbs carried him forward lightly—as easily as the two stronger, who had more weight to carry.

Nur-jahan's strength surprized Khlit, who knew not that the Persian had been a wanderer in many lands before she met Jahangir. When the sun was high overhead that day and the woman's steps began to falter, he unhooded the goshawk, slipping the leash from the bird's claws.

Here was no opportunity to ply the art of falconry. They had sighted no quarry on the mountain slopes to fly the goshawk at. Khlit could only free the bird and pray that it would sight game for itself.

The four halted, watching the falcon ascend in wide circles. It rose until it had become a dark speck against the blue of the sky. Still it circled.

"Allah be merciful! Grant that it find prey," uttered Nur-jahan, eyes bent aloft.

"And near at hand," added Chauna Singh, pointing to the rock walls that shut them in on both sides. Hamar said nothing, watching the bird with the calm of the fatalist.

"It must be well hungered," observed the Rájput, who understood the pastime of falconry, "and it will not return until it has sighted quarry. Ho—look yonder!"

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The goshawk had darted downward, wings folded. When it was once more well within sight it fluttered and circled, quartering across its previous course.

"It has sighted quarry!" cried Chauna Singh, moved out of his habitual quiet. "Now, it seeks it out—nay, it points to the thicket ahead of us. Ho—it strikes!"

The bird had disappeared among a clump of trees at one side of the ravine, some distance ahead. Chauna Singh and Khlit ran forward, scrambling over rocks and plunging across a freshet to the trees.

"Shiva send it be a mountain sheep. The bird was hungry!"

Pushing into the bushes, the two cast about for the falcon.

Presently the rustling of leaves attracted their attention and Chauna Singh pointed to where the bird was tearing at the body of a hare, shredding the flesh with its beak, fierce eyes gleaming redly at them.

"A hare!" growled the Rájput, angrily. "A hare among four!"

Nevertheless, he tore the bird from its hold on the warm quarry, hooded and shackled it. When Nur-jahan and Hamar came up, Khlit had prepared the flesh of the animal, roughly, for eating. The girl shivered at sight of the blood.

"Eat," said Chauna Singh, almost roughly. "It is not only food—but warmth."

Obediently, she swallowed some mouthfuls of the meat, until sudden sickness stayed her. Hamar refused his portion.

"What need have I of such?" he said tranquilly. "My strength lies not in meat."

Whereupon Chauna Singh, staring, put aside the minstrel's share for Nur-jahan. What remained he placed in a fold of his tunic. He and Khlit ate sparingly and urged the others ahead.

The ravine they had been following through many valleys gave way to the broad shoulder of the mountain. The last trees disappeared. The wind that pressed steadily in their faces grew colder. Standing in the open, they saw a score of mighty peaks stretching away on their left hand.

On their right Khlit saw a small pile of stone, topped by a flat slab, on which were graven some signs unknown to him.

"A shrine of the god Bon," whispered Nur-jahan, breathing heavily because of the thin air into which they had come.

"Here be none but the god!" cried Hamar aloud. He pointed down the gorge behind him. "There our guards wait. Ahead is the heart of Himachal, home of the many-faced gods!"

Khlit glanced at him sharply. The man's eyes were glowing somberly and his voice was shrill. The Cossack wondered if the lack of food had not done him harm.

Nevertheless, it was Hamar who took the lead, guiding them upward among the ridges.

At sunset Nur-jahan's knees gave way and she sank to the ground, uttering no cry. When Khlit and Chauna Singh touched her they saw that she was shivering.

The two glanced at each other significantly. Khlit took off his sheepskin *svitza* and cast it over the girl. Seeking a sheltered spot among the rocks, they rested, placing the girl between the three men.

Khlit fell asleep at once, to be roused shortly by Hamar. Chauna Singh had also slept. The Rájput gathered the passive woman in his arms and strode forward, Hamar leading.

In this fashion, relieved at times by Khlit, the man carried Nur-jahan through the night. He spoke no word, nor did he offer to rest. Only his heavy breathing testified to the effort Chauna Singh was making.

The silence of the higher spaces closed around the four. Khlit, plodding after the Rájput, thought of the sacrifice Nur-jahan had offered at Khoten to the gods of Himachal. Were there gods on Himachal? The icy fingers of cold plucked at his veins—the girl had his coat—and he shook his head savagely.

They had ventured into forbidden places, he thought. Here they were cast upon the roof of the world. Their lives had passed out of their keeping.

From the darkness ahead came the sound of a soft melody. The wind carried it clearly to Khlit. It was Hamar, striking upon his *vina*.

XIV

There are three things that change not—the will of the gods, the mountains of Himachal and the word of a Rájput.

Bengal proverb.

THE Lake of Lamdok Tso lies in the heart of the Himalayas, below the line of perpetual snow, and it is said by some that the sacred Indus, called by the disciples of Bon the Sing Chin Kamba—Lion's Mouth—rises therein.

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It is written that the Indus, blessing the happy land of Kashmir and moistening the purple iris fields from the Dhal Lake to the Grove of Sweet Breezes, falls from the skies through the waters of Lamdok Tso.

In the time of the Mogul Jahangir, the Kandrum Pass, leading from Leh to Khoten, ran by the left bank of the lake. Midway along the shore the trail crossed a promontory of rocks. This height could be seen from both ends of Lamdok Tso.

And so it happened that when Nur-jahan and her companions wandered down from the snow-line on aching feet bound by strips of Chauna Singh's turban, into the Kandrum gorge, they saw ahead of them the pin-point of a fire, as if hung above the shore of the lake.

Nur-jahan sighted it first, with a low cry.

"Look yonder!" she whispered, for her lips were stiff with cold. "A fire—and aid. It is not far."

Hamar halted at her cry, peering ahead through the darkness. Khlit swore joyfully, although weakly, for since the slaying of the hare they had walked steadily for a day and a half. Chauna Singh had not spoken since the dawn of the last day. He had carried Nur-jahan when she could not walk and aided her when she ventured afoot, her slippers bound by the cloth from his turban.

In this fashion they had crossed the snow field, eating the last of the meat as they went and satisfying their thirst with snow. Hamar had not eaten. How the minstrel retained his strength Khlit did not know—not understanding the control over their bodies possessed by the ascetics of India.

As they pressed forward toward the fire he pondered. Nur-jahan had spoken the truth when she said that the messenger from Sher Afghan would wait. If he were another such as Chauna Singh he would remain in the pass until he had lost hope of meeting those to whom he was sent.

Yet what was the message he bore? Hamar had seen him, spoken to him, but had said naught to Nur-jahan of the message. It was possible the other had wished to deliver it to no one but the woman.

Another thing. Here was a fire—some food—and a horse. But there also was the man who possessed them. How were five to live through the journey down the mountains to Kashmir? No other dwellers were in the heights. The chances of meeting with other travelers was slight. And four of the five were already greatly weakened.

Even the falcon was gone. When the meat gave out they had unhooded it again, but the bird had flown far from where they were.

Up the rising ground to the promontory they went, as quickly as might be. On their left hand the cold surface of the lake dropped further beneath them. On the right a precipice rose sheer. As they advanced the fire loomed larger—grew into a nest of flames, by which slept a man wrapped in a heavy cloak.

A rock, dislodged by Khlit's boots, fell into the lake and the man awoke. He sprang to his feet, staring into the darkness—a short, bearded warrior, clad in fine mail, who fingered the hilt of a jeweled sword.

Chauna Singh and Nur-jahan stumbled into the light and the man by the fire gave a cry of recognition. As Khlit stepped forward to warm himself at the flames Hamar joined him. Chauna Singh and the girl had paused by the stranger. They spoke together in a tongue Khlit did not understand.

He saw that Hamar watched out of narrow eyes, swaying the while with the movement of one who has been in motion for so long that his limbs are not readily brought to rest. The minstrel's eyes were sunk in his head, but they were quick and alert.

Nur-jahan had caught the arm of the messenger and was peering into his face intently. She had cast away her veil and the dark hair flooded about her pale cheeks.

Khlit saw the man glance from her to Chauna Singh. Then silence fell upon the group.

"Now we will hear the message," whispered Hamar. "He would not tell me."

Khlit had turned to the fire, when he heard a cry from Nur-jahan. In it dismay and joy were strangely mingled. He saw the girl draw back as if she did not wish the others to behold her face. Chauna Singh thrust his scarred face close to the man by the fire, questioning him fiercely. Hamar laughed softly.

"The Lion-Slayer is dead, khan," he whispered. "Sher Afghan has felt the hand of the Mogul—he who stood in the way of the love of the Mogul—he was sent for, resisted, and the men of Jahangir slew him in the fight that followed. That is the message. But give heed. There is a debt yet

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to be paid. The threads of fate must be knitted together."

"What mean you, minstrel?" growled the Cossack.

"This!" Hamar laughed again. "I have known Sher Afghan. And Chauna Singh is his man, pledged to serve him to the death. When Nur-jahan fled from the lord, he hated her—for his pride was stricken. And so he sent Chauna Singh. That much I know. Wherefore was the Rájput sent? Sher Afghan knew the love bond between the woman and Jahangir. He is not the man to see Nur-jahan belong to another after his death."

Khlit scanned the group by the fire, frowning. Chauna Singh and his comrade had ceased talking. The Rájput passed his hand across his eyes—once—and fumbled at his girdle. It was the gesture of a man feeling for a sword.

"See you that, khan?" muttered the minstrel. "Sher Afghan is dead. Chauna Singh has sworn an oath to his lord. Nay, I can guess what it was! Sher Afghan, as well as Jahangir, loved Nur-jahan—and love knows no pity——"

Khlit had left his side. The Cossack strode to the girl, who had drawn nearer the precipice, looking out over the lake. But Chauna Singh was as quick as he.

The Rájput had placed his hand on the girl's shoulder, not roughly, but gently. Khlit caught his wrist and held it firmly. The eyes of Chauna Singh burned into his own, the blind eye dull and lifeless. Nur-jahan turned and seeing the two men, was silent.

"Nay, Chauna Singh," growled the Cossack. "Are you a man to do a thing such as this?"

The lips of the Rájput curled angrily.

"Back, khan," he snarled. "Fool of the steppe! This is a matter which concerns you not."

Nur-jahan drew a quick breath. Hamar and the other stared, surprized into silence. Khlit's gaze did not flinch.

"The woman came to me in the desert," he said calmly. "We have shared bread and salt. You and I, Chauna Singh, have fought the same foes. We be true men—you and I. You will not harm the woman."

The Rájput wrenched himself free.

"I have sworn an oath, O one-without-understanding!" he hissed. "Is the word of a Rájput to his lord to be broken? Nay, since my birth it has not been so. When Sher Afghan's death should be known to me, I swore that Nur-jahan should die. Thus does widow of the Ráj join her lord. The lake will give her a grave. Back! I have sworn. Ho—" Khlit had drawn his sword —"Ramdoor Singh!"

Fiercely the Rájput cast himself empty-handed upon Khlit. As swiftly the Cossack struck. Chauna Singh's turban had been used to cover the feet of his mistress and his head was bare. The curved blade fell upon his temple, sending him reeling to the earth.

As he struck, Khlit had deftly turned his weapon, so the flat of the blade had met the other's brow.

The next instant, at a warning cry from Nur-jahan, he had turned in time to ward a powerful sweep of Ramdoor Singh's weapon. The stocky warrior leaped back from Khlit's counter-thrust and the two circled warily, striving to get the light of the fire in the other's eyes.

Again the weapons clashed. Weariness smote through Khlit's lean frame. He saw the dark face of the other framed against the black expanse of darkness over the lake.

Then Ramdoor Singh cast up his arms. His sword flew from his grasp. His body sank backward and away—and Khlit was gazing into the dark where his foe had been.

A second passed—and he heard a splash over the precipice, far beneath. Hamar came to his side and peered over the edge of the cliff.

"Ramdoor Singh wore mail," the minstrel said slowly. "His death will be swift. I saw him slip on a little stone at the edge. Truly, the ways of fate are past knowing."

XV

KHLIT had seated himself on a stone, for he was weary, nursing his sword. And as he did so he watched Nur-jahan. The woman had Chauna Singh's bleeding head on her knee. With strips torn from her undergarments and moistened in melted snow she bathed the dark bruise where Khlit's blade had crushed the skin.

From the other side of the fire Hamar watched, his thin frame sunken together with fatigue, his eyes bright as with fever. Chauna Singh stirred, moaned, and lifted a hand that trembled to his head.

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"Ramdoor Singh!" he muttered. "Ramdoor Singh—to me! Ha—am I blind?"

"Nay, Chauna Singh," said the girl softly, "you are hurt."

The lips of the Rájput moved and his good eye opened, only to close at once. With returning consciousness the warrior stifled his groans. But the Cossack saw that he was in pain.

"Ramdoor Singh is dead—in the waters of Lamdok Tso," went on Nur-jahan, "and you would be likewise but for the mercy of the khan. He stayed his hand when he might have slain. That is well, for I would speak with you, Chauna Singh. Look at me!"

The man opened his eye and peered about him dully. A wrinkle of pain crossed his swollen forehead.

"I can not see—yet," he said calmly.

Nur-jahan searched his bearded face intently, as if striving to read therein what she wanted to know.

"Tell me, Chauna Singh, warrior of Jhelam, man of Sher Afghan, who is dead—is it your will still to slay me? When have I done you ill? Nay, I thought that you had love for Nur-jahan, the betrothed of Jahangir the Mogul."

"By the sack of Chitore, I swore it—that I would safeguard you for him that was Sher Afghan, protect you and keep your honor with my life—until the death of my lord. I made him this oath when he set me after you, knowing that his life was no longer safe. Then, when I had news of his death, I was to slay you. By the sin of the sack of Chitore, on the word of a Rájput, it was sworn."

Silence followed upon this. Khlit, meditating, recalled the speech of Chauna Singh—*since life was in Ind, a Rájput has kept faith.*

And Nur-jahan had suspected something of this, for she had not told Chauna Singh that a man of Sher Afghan awaited them. Chauna Singh had done his best to keep his oath. Nay—knowing the man, Khlit felt this to be true—he would still strive to carry out his word.

"What care I for Jahangir," the Rájput muttered fiercely, "the Mogul—a Moslem without doubt—a stripling? Nay, Sher Afghan is dead."

Nur-jahan stroked his forehead idly with the cloth. Fatigue had drawn the flesh of her round face close upon the bones—yet had increased the beauty of the lovely mouth and dark eyes.

"The time came," spoke Nur-jahan softly, "and you attacked me, Chauna Singh. If I live, I shall be mistress of many thousand swords. Will you not forget and have the honor that I can give you?"

"I will not forget."

"You can not carry out your promise to—to Sher Afghan. Unwillingly I was forced to cross the threshold of the Lion-Slayer's home. Chauna Singh, my heart has been in the keeping of Jahangir—although I have seen him not for years. We were betrothed. Allah's mercy may bring me safe to the court of the Mogul. Think upon that, Chauna Singh—and say if you will not forget. You have not known the bond of love?"

"Aye, for my lord. He was a true man."

"And you can be to me what you were to him."

A mute shake of the head was her answer.

"We have shared peril together, Chauna Singh."

The Rájput was silent, his dark face impassive.

"Harken, Chauna Singh—" the beautiful head lifted proudly—"it is Mir-un-nissa who asks, Nur-jahan, Light of the Palace and Flower of the World. I ask it of you. Forget the oath."

"It may not be."

Across the fire Khlit saw Hamar watching keenly what passed. The face of the minstrel was inscrutable. A thought came to Khlit. Chauna Singh would be faithful to his word. And this must cost him his life.

Nur-jahan could not carry the wounded man down the mountain slopes to safety. Chauna Singh was strong, and the wound was not severe. The girl's life would not be safe in his company.

Khlit had discovered Ramdoor Singh's horse picketed in a clump of willows not far from the fire—and some dried dates and rice in the saddle-bags. Enough to get them alive into Kashmir. But they could not take Chauna Singh.

What then? Leave him by Lamdok Tso? That meant death, for the warrior was half starved, and hurt, and travelers in the Kandrum pass were few.

It was for Nur-jahan to decide, thought Khlit. And he watched the girl. She shook back the dark hair from her eyes and stretched out her small hand.

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"Give me the curved sword, khan."

Khlit handed her the blade without a word. The girl fingered it quietly. Then laid it against the side of Chauna Singh's throat. The Rájput gave no sign he had heard, or felt.

"Look at me, Chauna Singh," she said.

The man shook his head slightly.

"I can not see. The hurt is above my eye."

"You can feel. I hold the curved sword of the khan, Khlit. Speak, Chauna Singh! Since you will not forget the oath, you must choose. Shall it be death here, at my hand—or to be left when we go down the pass at dawn? As you choose, it shall be."

Chauna Singh raised himself unsteadily on one arm.

"I do not offer you life, Chauna Singh—for I know that you may not be bought. Choose!"

The Rájput laughed and lay back on the earth wearily.

"Shall I be food for the ravens, Nur-jahan? Nay, let it be death by the sword. It is well. And then the waters of the lake."

The girl brushed the sword against his throat. And Khlit saw her smile.

"Give heed," she said softly. "Your life is mine. You have said it. And—I spare it. I have taken from Sher Afghan the life of his follower that was his. And I have given you fresh life. Remember—for it is a debt—and you are a man of the Ráj."

No muscle moved in the warrior's face. In the silence Khlit heard the murmur of water against the lake shore beneath them.

"It is a debt, Chauna Singh. Your life is mine, and I am safe henceforth from harm at your hand. Some day you will pay back the debt. That is the way of the Ráj." She turned to Khlit wearily. "You have found food, khan. We must eat and sleep. For we must be on our way at dawn."

Khlit wondered but said nothing as he took back his sword. For the first time in many days he saw Hamar eat—but sparingly.

So it happend that when the pale dawn touched the peaks above them and the faint reflections took shape in the dark pool of Lamdok Tso, Nur-jahan had Chauna Singh placed upon the horse and they set their faces toward Kashmir. Now Chauna Singh's scarred face was somber, for he saw nothing of the dawn. And Hamar, walking before them, did not make music upon his *vina*.

"Here is talk of a debt," Khlit heard the minstrel mutter, "but who shall give the gods what is owing to them?"

XVI

IT HAD rained for a day and a night and part of the next day. Hamar, who led the four, shivered beneath his thin garment. The horse under Nur-jahan and Chauna Singh slipped and floundered down the mud of the trail.

Khlit, walking beside the minstrel, moved ahead mechanically, as he had done for many days. He could see little of their surroundings, for a wall of rain closed them in. He noticed that the crags and ravines of the mountains had given way to dark-green woods, traversed by foaming freshets. The air was warmer. This was well, he thought, for Nur-jahan could not have lived through the rain, had the cold of the mountain peaks been upon them.

He guessed—since the minstrel was silent and Nur-jahan in the stupor of weariness—that they were among foot-hills. But as yet there was no sign of dwelling or human being.

Chauna Singh had not spoken since the night of Ramdoor Singh's death. But Khlit fancied that the Rájput's sight had healed in his good eye. Nur-jahan seemed to have no fear of Chauna Singh since she had spared the warrior's life. She had laid a debt upon the man.

They were content to follow Hamar, who had said that there was a building near at hand.

Khlit was weary, and he knew that Nur-jahan's slender strength was only upheld by the thought of her nearness to Jahangir and the Mogul court. Hamar's endurance amazed him—when he roused himself to think collectively. The man pressed ahead as if driven by a will more than human—stumbling and shivering as he went, but with eyes fastened on the rain mist in front of them.

In this manner out of the breast of Himachal came the four—to where a wall loomed out of the mist. A wall of stone, carved with characters unknown to Khlit.

Hamar greeted the stone inscription with a glad cry and hastened his steps, turning off to one side of the way, to follow the wall

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which stretched before them, endlessly graven with the carven letters.

Chauna Singh had not looked up.

"Here is the place we seek!" croaked the minstrel. "Lo, the prayers to a great god are upon the stone. Come, we must hasten! We have been long."

And he shivered again, raising trembling hands to his head. The man's eyes were alight as if from fever. Khlit thought that it was a strange fever—not knowing the manner of strength which had sustained the fragile man for so long.

Above their heads the dark pile of a building took shape amid the rain. It was lofty, rising from a walled courtyard. A tower surmounted the gateway.

For an instant the rain dwindled, and, a fresh wind springing up, Khlit saw that the wall they had been following shielded a cliff. The mass of the building they had come to lay against the edge of the cliff.

Out and below them he glimpsed a level plain cut by a winding river.

"The valley of the Indus!" cried Nur-jahan, stirring in the Rájput's hold. "We must be near to Leh!"

Hamar laughed and stretched his thin arms overhead.

"Aye—near!" he muttered. "A slave upon a buffalo might ride to Leh within two days—but we are not at Leh. Ho, between us and there be the men of Jahangir. But we be here. Come, we are late!"

With that he hurried under the gate into the courtyard, pulling at the bridle of the horse. As he did so the rain closed in again, shutting off the sight of the valley. Khlit stumbled after the horse. But within the court he hesitated.

No men were to be seen. No windows showed in the stone walls which disappeared into the mist overhead. Shadows wreathed the corners. Before them was an iron-studded door. Complete silence reigned in the place.

For a moment the mind of the Cossack was prey to illusion. He had a fancy that their week's journey had taken them nowhere—that they were still at Khoten. A chord of memory had been touched and wrought the illusion. Then again, in the shadows of the court he fancied shapes appeared and moved.

Against the wall was a shadowy form, monstrous and cold. It was an animal of gigantic form—or was it an animal? He had heard priests tell of Ganesh, the elephant-headed god, and Hanuman, the monkey-god.

Then Khlit shook his head savagely and saw that what he beheld was a stone image at one side of the door—an elephant of red sandstone with a figure mounted astride its neck.

Other shadows issued from the door—a light gleamed within. The people of the place had sighted them and were coming out. Khlit saw Nur-jahan slip from the horse. It was well, he thought, for the woman must be faint. And he swore gruffly, because he had shivered again.

Then a gray shadow wheeled and brushed past him. Khlit drew back, staring. Surely this was Chauna Singh bent over the neck of the horse, riding from the place!

He drew his hand across his brow, cursing. The form was gone. But hoofs echoed on the road behind him, fading into the distance.

Why had Chauna Singh done this? Khlit knew not. He felt hands touch him and stumbled forward again.

These were shadows, he told himself. Yet without doubt they were men, for they touched him. Why could he not see their faces? Again came the illusive memory—this was Khoten, not Kashmir.

How could that be? Khlit summoned his strength and tried to see what was around him. He wished to see the men, not shadows. Yet they were not all men—some were women. Torchlight was in his eyes now, blinding him, for he had been in semi-darkness for many hours.

The hands that were guiding him pushed him forward. A door closed behind him. The torches went before him down a hall—up some steps—into another hall. He heard voices which he did not understand.

His knee touched a bench and he sat upon it, for he was very weary. So much so that he had no desire for food. He craved rest and sleep. Here was warmth and shelter from the rain that had beat upon him for two days and a night. Rest—and sleep.

The torches went away. Khlit's head dropped on his shoulder—and he slept.

Only fitfully. For he woke from time to time, hearing a noise which disturbed him. It was a deep, echoing sound, like the beat of temple drums. After a long while Khlit

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lifted his head. Men were standing near him and the torches had come again.

Then Khlit knew what his memory had been trying to tell him. The place they had come to in the mist was like to the temple of Khoten—the sound of the drums was the same. The courtyard had been the same.

He looked full into the face of Hamar.

"Tell me, minstrel," he muttered, "be we in Kashmir or back in the devil temple of Khoten?"

Hamar smiled, and the fever was still in his eyes.

"We were long in coming, khan. But I guided you truly. You and Nur-jahan are in a temple—aye, but not that of Khoten. 'Tis the home of the god Bon, the shrine of the master of Himachal in Kashmir—and I have brought you here."

XVII

THEN Khlit looked about him. Several men in dark robes stood near, bearing torches. By their light he saw Nur-jahan beside him, erect and silent, his sheepskin coat thrown from her shoulders, her garments shrunk to her slender body by the wet.

Others sat on benches in the shadows by the walls. They were white of face and wore the dress of the black priests. A long chamber stretched before him, lighted after a fashion by candles. At the end of the chamber was a dais of stone.

On this pedestal Khlit could see twin shapes that resembled feet, of monstrous size. The rest of the form was hidden by a curtain which hung from the ceiling.

Again the sound of the gongs came to him, and Nur-jahan spoke.

"You have brought us—here—Hamar? You who were my friend?"

"Aye," said the minstrel slowly. "But what is friendship? Two leaves drifting together down the highway at the wind's touch. Lo, I am a servant of Bon. The other gods are small beside Bon. For greater than the many-faced gods is fate. And death is one with fate. Death is the power that holds us in its grasp—and I am a servant of death."

He paused, to glance fleetingly at the curtain in the shadows. When he spoke again his voice was gentle.

"There lived one man, Nur-jahan, who was strong enough to wrestle with fate. That was Akbar, the Mogul. Out of the threads of life his hands wove the fabric of an empire. He saw beyond the many shrines of the gods—Moslem or Brahman. He sought a greater wisdom than theirs. Even to the temple of Bon he came and bent his head."

A murmur of assent issued from the lips of the men who sat by the wall. Nur-jahan stared at them proudly.

"The word of Akbar was law among us, Nur-jahan," went on the minstrel. "His last thought was for his empire. A mighty man and strong, he. But he yielded to the call of death. And he ordered your death, for he foresaw trouble if you were joined to Jahangir."

Khlit rose to his feet, the stupor of sleep clearing from his brain. No one heeded him. The passive silence of the watchers irked him. Here was an evil place.

"The servants of Bon," cried a voice from the gloom, "are enemies of the Moslems. The death of Nur-jahan will be pleasing to the god."

"Aye," assented Hamar softly, "it is so. You have sharp eyes and wit, Nur-jahan, beloved of the Moghul. But you were blind—you and the two fools who served you. I was the messenger of Bon, sent to Khoten to bring you hither. It was I who kept Bator Khan from striving to take your life in the desert of Gobi. For your two fools are strong of limb and they were watching the dog of a Turkoman. So I waited."

"False to your salt!" mocked the girl.

"Nay, what is faith among men but an idle word? At Khoten I sought for you long, but Chauna Singh had hidden you well, and so I and those who served me might not harm you—then. Before the temple of Bon in the city your death was decreed. Yet, for once, your wit saved you—when you offered yourself a sacrifice."

"Was I one to be a victim to the mummery of the black priests?"

"Nay, Nur-jahan, it is better so. You have given yourself to Bon, and the god will have your sacrifice. In the mountains I feared lest my feeble strength fail, and I should not guide you here. So I played the mystical music of Bon and was heartened."

Khlit held himself erect by an effort of will. His endurance had been sapped by the last three days, and he knew that he had not the strength to lift a weapon. Age had

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taken from him the vigor that was Chauna Singh's. Indeed, the priests had not troubled to take his sword. In the brief silence came the ceaseless beat of the temple gongs.

"By the Lake of Lamdok Tso," smiled Hamar, "I thought that the will of the Rájput would rob me of your death. But fate had willed that it was not to be by his hand."

"Aye," said a voice, "they bound themselves over to the god, and thus it shall be."

"Well I knew the way to this temple, Nur-jahan. I prayed for strength to finish my task—and it was given me."

XVIII

KHLIT glanced around from face to face. He saw the same thing mirrored in all—the blood lust that had stirred the crowd in Khoten. The beauty of Nur-jahan only excited them further. The girl was pale, her thin cheeks ringed by dark, wet hair. But her eyes were proud.

Here was a true daughter of kings, thought the Cossack. Worn by the hardships they had been through, she still had spirit to confront those who hungered for her death.

"Better the swift hand of the Rájput!" she cried. "Than this thing of evil!"

"Nay, Nur-jahan, queen among women," smiled the minstrel-priest. "Chauna Singh is but a man. When he lifted his eyes in the courtyard and saw whither he had been brought, he fled. Here your blood will be laid before a god. You have sought to grasp the scepter of an empire in your lotus-hand, Nur-jahan, but no one can wrest life from death. That which causes life causes also death."

Khlit missed the sound that had been echoing through the hall. The temple gongs were silent.

"We shall not delay further, Nur-jahan," said a hard voice.

Khlit swayed and cursed his weakness. If he had been able to lift sword he would have flung himself upon the man who had betrayed them. But such was his weakness that he could not speak. Not so Nur-jahan. The girl's dark eyes flashed.

"Ho, priest!" she cried. "Your folly has made you mad. Think you, when Jahangir hears of this, he will leave one stone upon another, of this temple? Will one of you—" she swept an arm at the watchers—"save his life, if you slay me? The arm of the Mogul is long, and his love is everlasting as the hills."

"How shall he know?" Hamar smiled. "The khan who came with you will die at the same time. And Chauna Singh, remembering what he himself had planned to do, will not dare speak. Jahangir will not know. No tales pass beyond the walls of this temple."

Khlit shook his head, for he thought that the illusions of a few hours ago were returning. Voices came to his keen ears from without, and the halls of the temple echoed strangely. Nur-jahan's cheeks, instead of being pale, had flushed, suddenly.

"Will you slay a woman, Hamar," she cried loudly, "in this place of evil—and a woman who is loved of the Mogul?"

"Aye!" cried the voices around the wall, "For she has given herself!"

The sounds without grew in volume, swelling over the cries of the priests. Khlit wondered if many were coming to the hall. He knew not the customs of these temples. And still the clamor grew. Men rose along the wall and slipped from the door. Others glanced about uneasily.

Nur-jahan had not ceased speaking. But Khlit paid no further heed to her. He had heard a sound which stirred his blood. Was it more of the mummery of the black priests? He knew not.

And then the girl fell silent. And silence held the room, with those who remained within it.

Hamar's eyes turned from them to the door. And Khlit saw that he was troubled. The gaze of the others followed that of the minstrel.

A crashing blow sounded somewhere below them. At once the muffled sounds swelled clearer, as if a gateway had been opened. And Khlit laughed. He had heard what he knew well—the echo of horses' hoofs—many of them—upon stone.

The priests rose and hurried to the door. Hamar stared blankly. Came a pistol shot, followed by the ring of weapons. Nur-jahan caught Khlit's arm.

"Back!" she whispered. "Into the shadows."

And then Khlit was standing, sword in hand, in the gloom by the foot of the god Bon. The tumult increased to a roar—a shout from many throats.

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"Hol Nila-ghora ki aswár!"

"The battle-cry of the Rájputs, khan," whispered the girl, her eyes proud. "Said I not Jahangir was lord of swift swords? Harken—they are riding their horses into the temple. They have come to meet me—Jahangir has sent his men to meet me!"

Khlit saw the bent form of Hamar scramble to the door, then pause, looking around wildly. A pistol cracked without the door and the man clutched the air, screaming. A wind swept into the place, blotting out many of the candles. On the stone floor the scattered torches were smouldering into embers.

Khlit roused himself to understanding of what had happened.

"Nay," he laughed, "Chauna Singh has paid his debt. The Rájput has brought hither the men from Leh. It is well."

Whereupon, being weary, he sat down on the dais. And was asleep on the instant, his head pillowed on the foot of the god Bon.

THE LOG-SPOTTER

By ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD

ONE for "Maurice" and two for "Z,"
One for "O" and the "L. M. P."
Lord, what a life! To tally the drift,
And see 'em caught and watch 'em lift,
Watchin' the marks, as they roll away,
Keepin' the score at 'two per day.'

Wet to the knees and swearin' mad—
—— of a job for a rollin' lad!
One for "S" and "Triangle 3"—
Company job for a Bill like me!
An endless chain that hikes 'em clear,
An endless chain of me days down here!

One for "Maurice," one for "Z,"
Two for the "O" and the "L. M. P"—
The boys are shovin' the big log jams,
Runnin' 'em out and over the dams;
Company job for a busted knee—
Wisht I'd gone when the jam got me!

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THE IRON DOLLAR

by HENRY LEVERAGE

"THE Dropper" watched a long queue of whalers receiving their wage through the grilled brass of Garford and Bell's office on East Street, San Francisco.

The whaleship *Gleaner* had reached port that day. She had spent two seasons in the arctic. She had Wintered at Herschel Island. She lay at anchor with only the shipkeepers aboard.

The business of paying off sailors was usually of interest to the Dropper. He was a crimp who believed that a seaman's memory is always shorter than a voyage.

Scant spoil was there that afternoon, however. The *Gleaner* had cruised in hard luck. She brought only three heads of bone to port. The first five whalemen to be paid off received small gold pieces—few in number. The sixth man—a towering Dane—was paid with a silver dollar.

He went berserker. He tore the grilled work from the cashier's window, brought the grid down over the head of the astonished clerk and then charged out toward the door like a killer whale running amuck.

"What happened, Steve?" asked the alert Dropper soothingly.

"I thank I get an iron dollar. *Ja!* I got it! I thank I kill somebody."

The Dropper was chinless. His eyes were watery. His brain-pan sloped back beneath a curl of jet-black hair.

"Come with me, Steve," he said. "I'll show you how to fix the dirty scum that robbed you. We'll get a drink."

Steve Larsen square-set an unshaven jaw. He thrust out his right hand, palm upward. The silver dollar clung to the sweat. He eyed it with shelving blond brows shading his wide blue eyes.

"By ——!" he said.

"Yes," said the Dropper. "Come on. It's a dirty shame the way they treat you first-class seamen. Two years up North and paid off with an iron dollar. I know how you can get your money from those robbers. Garford is a shark. He lives on Knob Hill in a palace, Steve. He made a million working poor old Jack before the mast."

Steve pocketed the dollar. He glared at the Dropper's pipe-stem neck. He worked his thick fingers. Turning, he glanced with a fighting flash toward the knot of men around the shipping office.

"We better hurry," said the Dropper. "They're coming after you."

"I fight them all!"

"Yes, after while. Come on, now. I'm going to show you how you can get those hands of yours around Garford's throat. You can squeeze and squeeze him, Steve. You can shake the dollars out of him. He's got a chest filled with money up on Knob Hill. His girl has got diamonds and gold chains. I'll show you the place after we get a drink."

The Dane allowed the Dropper to lead him through an alley and out on Mission Street, which they crossed on a diagonal to the Blubber Room—a barrel-house dive where steam beer was served for chasers.

A dingy bar, a score of fist-banged tables and a few fly-specked chromos of clipper ships made up the Blubber Room. The

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air was stale, as in the hold of a China packet. The men who sat at the tables were gnarled and leather-faced. They all wore caps.

A roaring chantey greeted the entrance of the Dropper and Steve Larsen. The strident notes of a whaler's song rocked the ancient rafters:

"Rah for the grog—the jolly, jolly grog!
Rah for the grog and tobacco!
We've spent all our tin with the ladies, drinkin' gin,
And across the briny ocean we must wan—der."

The Dropper led the Dane to a corner. He motioned for two whiskies. He upended his glass and watched Steve gulp the fiery portion.

Leaning over the sloppy table, the crimp suggested:

"Have another. Come, fill 'em up, Jake."

They drank five whiskies. The Dane leaned back in his chair. He roamed the place with his wide blue eyes. He pulled out his two-years' wage and banged it on the table.

The Dropper slid it toward him.

"Keep the iron dollar," he said. "It's a good-luck piece, mate."

"I thank it's bad luck."

"Oh, no! No! No! We'll make it good luck. You're going to get all of Garford's gold. I'll show you how."

"I kill him—the shark! He sweat me and rob me and fool me—two years."

"Yes, Steve. We'll go now. We'll climb Knob Hill. I'll show you where the land scum lives. He's got a girl with pearls and big gold chains. You kill her, too?"

"*Ja!*"

The Dropper paid the drink score. He led the Dane from the Blubber Room. They threaded the dark alley and walked along busy arc-flamed streets until they had reached the crest of Knob Hill.

A towering white marble hotel loomed through the mist. Snug residences perched on concrete abutments. Great iron fences enclosed velvety lawns. Soft lights glowed from wine-colored windows.

"There's where the shark lives," said the Dropper. "Stand here, Steve. They're opening the gates. We'll see who comes out."

The Dane shelved forward his shoulders. He pulled down his cap. He swayed from side to side as if on the deck of a ship at sea. He crammed his huge hands in the pockets of his knitted jacket.

A limousine rolled into the courtyard on wheels of silence. A door opened. An oblong of mellow light sprang out through the night's mist. A silk-hatted man led a thin-flanked woman down the steps. Her eyes were cerulean. Her cloak lifted and exposed taper ankles. She entered the limousine, laughing lightly. The man followed her. He carried a dark-leather suitcase.

"Garford," whispered the Dropper into the Dane's ear. "That's Garford—who gave you the iron dollar. The girl is his daughter."

Steve Larsen drew his hands from his pockets. He started toward the limousine as it rolled through the gate. The Dropper clutched his arm.

"Not now!" he said. "Wait. We'll go around the house. I'll show you a window where you can get in tonight. I'll show you where the chest is, and the gold chains. I'll get you tools so you can open the chest. Come on, Steve. We'll get more drinks."

The seaman stared after the limousine. He followed the crimp.

THEY rounded the high fence and walked along the lip of the hill, where concrete was supported by piling and sub-rock. The Dropper guided the Dane to a foothold from which could be seen a rear view of the Garford mansion.

"That window," he said, pointing to one on the second floor between two dark bays. "You see it, Steve?"

"*Ja!*"

"The vines run up there. The waterspout and lightning-rod pass right by it. You can climb, Steve?"

The seafarer's eyes glowed.

"I climb—*ja!*"

"Sure, you can! Haven't I seen you on a fore royal yard? You are the best sailor in this port. You ought to be a mate—instead of slaving for two years in the arctic for an iron dollar."

"I thank I have plenty money pretty soon."

"Money and revenge, Steve," said the crimp. "You come up here at three this morning. You climb the fence and climb the vines and go through that window. You'll find the chest in that room. Garford sleeps in the next. Kill him and open

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the chest and bring me some of the gold chains."

The Dane stared at the dark walls of the house. He turned and followed the crimp to the street. They went down the hill, arm in arm. They threaded through the early evening crowds. They came to Mission Street, where the Dropper left the sailor standing on the sidewalk while he went into a dark hallway. He returned with tools clinking under his coat.

The whaleman swayed as he led him toward East Street. The brogans of the two men tapped the pavements. The Dropper glanced over shoulder. He pulled out a nickel-plated watch with a luminous dial.

"We've got plenty of time yet," he said. "Let's walk around."

Twenty shocks of barrel-house whisky, followed by as many more steam beer chasers, were calculated to place the Dane in a prime condition for red murder and a bungling job.

The crimp acted the rôle of pilot-fish. He saw to it that Steve was seated in a dark corner of the Blubber Room. He leaned over the foam-streaked table after a keen-lidded glance at the seafaring denizens of the place.

"You stay here," he said. "I'll be back in an hour. I'll see if Garford has come home."

"I go with you!"

"No, stay here. It's too early for you to climb through that window, Steve. You must do it at three o'clock."

The Dane stared drunkenly at the bulge under the crimp's coat. He swayed in his chair. His eyes wandered to the model of a clipper ship behind the bar. His head pitched forward. He dropped his face in his hands and started snoring.

The Dropper glided over the barroom floor. He jerked a thumb toward the sleeping Dane and said to the bartender:

"Watch my friend, Jake. Give him more drinks if he wakes up. Tell him it's on me. I'll be back in an hour."

The bartender curled a glossy mustache with thick fingers.

"A China passage would do that fellow good," he suggested, winking shrewdly.

"China? Say, Jake, I'm going to send him on a fifty-year voyage to San Quentin. You'll never see him again. Why, he's been talking about robbing a house tonight. You know what a stretch he'll get for a thing like that in this State?"

"He don't look like a prowler," the bartender mused.

"Neither do I," grinned the Dropper, sliding toward the steps that led from the Blubber Room.

STEVE finished his drunken sleep. He awoke. He lifted his flushed, unshaven face from his hands. The crowd of seamen had thinned. Three sailors were gathered around a table. A frowsled derelict slept in one corner of the saloon. His head rested on the sawdust of the floor.

Slowly the Dane's eyes fastened upon the nodding bartender. He banged the table with his great right fist. He was childishly surly from the lees of the drink within him.

"Where's my friend?" he asked.

"He'll be back."

The man wiped the table with his apron. He set a black bottle and a chipped glass before the Dane.

Steve finished three drinks. He glanced around for a clock. There was none in sight. Rolling to the bar, he tossed down his only dollar.

The bartender eyed it calculatingly. He recalled that the Dropper had stated that he would pay for all the drinks the Dane wanted.

"Take your money," he said to Steve. "It's no good, here."

"I thank it's pretty good. I work two years for it."

"An iron dollar, eh?"

Steve scowled as he pocketed the silver piece. He pushed away from the bar. He turned, straightened himself, then strode lankily toward the door that led by way of a flight of broken steps to the street. There was a spouting bowhead painted on the top of this door. He eyed it. He went through and out into the misty night with one thought burning his whisky-fumed brain. This was the drink-encouraged idea of robbing Garford. Did not the whaleship owner live in a palace bought with the sweat of seamen's brows and chests and arms?

A clock before a pawn-shop on Mission Street showed the hour to be one-thirty. Steve reeled along the sidewalk. He turned and studied this clock. His subconscious

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mind, far within the flush of the red whisky, told him that he had an appointment with some one at some hour that morning.

He shook his tow head. He pulled the visor of his cap far down over his eyes. He started crossing Market Street on the way to Knob Hill.

It reared before him like the slanting deck of a ship. He slipped back on the narrow grass-grown street he essayed to climb. He crawled in the manner of drunken men. He rose and went on, pulling himself upward by great efforts of his cable-thick arms.

He reached the asphalt on top of the hill. The lights showed twinkling and clear in the sleeping city. Above, however, was a hovering mist that lay like a wet sail on the marble palace's top that crowned the city.

Steve found the narrow lip of concrete that ran to the back of Garford's mansion. He poised on the edge with his brogans thrust through the iron palings of a fence. He moved noiselessly until he reached a place where one spear point was absent from the barricade.

Before climbing, he stared at the ivy and wisteria-covered stones of the mansion. No light shone through any of the curtains. The faint roar that came up to him was the morning traffic of the restless metropolis. A moan sounded within this roar. It was the far-off beat of surf on the Seal Rocks beyond the Cliff House and the Golden Gate.

Steve went over the fence. He crossed the narrow patch of close-cropped grass. He drew himself up the waterspout like a master seaman surmounting a topmast. He reached out. He grasped the sill of the half-opened window. It was the one the Dropper had pointed out.

Slowly he pressed up the window frame with the flat of his free hand. It made scant noise. He waited, breathing heavily. A curling fog wrapped the mansion. Under cover of this he threw his knee over the sill and climbed into the room.

Standing on a thick rug, he listened with his great ears straining. He heard no sound for some time. He had taken one step in the gloom when there floated to him the soft breathing of a near-by sleeper.

He swung his square-set jaw over his bulging chest. He glared through the opalescent diamonds of a demi-door. There was a faint light in the other room. He moistened his lips. He advanced with his heavy brogans sinking into the pile of the rug.

Prowling was not his profession. He stumbled once. He waited on his haunches with every giant muscle strained for a spring. He rose and moved another step toward the glass door.

It came to him through that fuddled and whisky-soaked brain that Garford most likely was sleeping beyond the opal diamonds through which the pale light glowed. He saw the description he had of the shipowner—a silk-hatted man with a keen face and gray hair. His fingers worked in the gloom. They throttled a score of imaginary necks. They crushed into the palms of his hands. The sweat rolled down the hair of his breast and trickled through his underwear.

His hand dropped to his side. He felt the iron dollar in his trouser pocket. It flamed a resentment through his veins. He abandoned caution. A long stride carried him to the door. He pressed it open. Beyond the light that glowed from a night-lamp, there stood a huge four-poster bed with a mounded form in its center.

Steve moved toward this bed. He reached out over the mound. His fingers were ready to coil the neck and constrict the flesh when he saw golden hair draped over a white pillow. He widened his eyes. The night sight came slowly to him. His fingers dropped away and rested with the tips touching the coverlet.

The sleeper moved slightly. A soft flutter rose through the slender neck. An arm was flung over the golden strands.

Steve watched this arm, fascinated by its soft purity. The elbow was dimpled. The color of the flesh was pink. The scent of an Eastern perfume floated to his widened nostrils. It drove the whisky fumes out of his brain.

He lifted his weight from the bed, bringing back his hands to his sides. He stood, pressing one knee against the coverlet. His gaze was on the outlines of the girl's face. Her cheeks were like rose-petals. Her tiny teeth showed through Cupid-parted lips. Her breast mounded the spread.

He shook his head and turned away. He eyed the night-lamp which stood on a

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slender table. Moving toward this, he went through the half-opened door with the diamond-shaped glass.

A faint roar came from the direction of the window. The fog showed against the city's glow. The room he stood in was bare of bed or safe or chairs. He reached along the wall. His fingers encountered a knob. Twisting this, he strained his eyes beyond the doorway. No light showed in the chamber. The blinds were drawn.

"I thank Garford sleeps here," he said thickly. "I thank the gold chains are——"

A tightening of the muscles of his neck and biceps flashed the fact to his brain that some one had creaked a bed within the chamber. He lifted one foot, tripped upon the fringe of a rug and staggered forward with his great arms outstretched in the gloom. Berserker rage came to him as he flailed the air. He fought against an invisible foe. The swift breath of a man sounded to his right. He leaped toward the bed, encountered the resistance of flesh and bore his weight down on a struggling form.

"*Ja,* God!" he bellowed, snapping a wrist and clutching the warm column of a man's neck. "*Ja!* You fool Steve Larsen! *Ja!*"

The crunching grip he fastened compressed the flesh to a thin shred. He raised his knee and thrust with it viciously. He fell over from the force of his own impetus. He did not let go his crunching hold. He worried the body like a shark with a morsel of food. He lifted his prey and crashed it down upon the floor. He shook the room with his rage. He staggered up finally. His fingers coiled and uncoiled in the gloom. The mass at his feet was far too quiet to be of this world.

Strangely enough, the red kill changed his purpose. He was no longer berserker. He stood with lowered chin. He waited for the alarm to spread through the house and the city. It did not come. No servant called or climbed the stairs. No whistle shrilled the air. The mansion was silent. The early-morning traffic of the city roared far away—like a sea-shell held to the ear.

Steve lifted his chin. He thought of the chest which should be in the chamber. He had matches. There were electric switches somewhere on the walls. The desire for gain had left him. The fumes of the dead liquor belched through his nostrils. It seemed bitter as he expanded and contracted the muscles of his chest.

"*Ja!* I kill you, Garford," he said. "Now I go."

He turned. His brogan struck a metallic object on the rug. He stepped over it and reached the door. A faint light came through the window by which he had entered the central room. Added to this light was the soft glow from the night-lamp in the girl's bedchamber.

Watching these two sources of illumination, vague as they were, he heard a bed creak, a sound of bare feet on a rug and a low cry.

GARFORD'S daughter stood framed in the doorway. Her eyes flashed a startled question at the looming bulk of the Dane. She raised her slim fingers to her temples.

"Who are you?" she asked.

Steve relaxed his bulky muscles. His chest contracted. He shifted uneasily and thrust a foot toward the window.

"Go back to bed," he said. "I thank I kill your father."

"My father?"

"*Ja!*"

It was stated simply enough. The lees of the drink had soured within the man. He felt the first reaching hand of remorse. He would have to flee the house and the city. He would seek a hiding-place in the hold of an outbound ship. He moved a foot or more toward the window.

The girl stared past him in the direction of the half-opened door that led to the master's bedchamber. The light was too faint for her to discern an object huddled on the floor.

"I thought I heard something," she said. "How did you get in here? Who are you?"

Steve's hand touched his pocket, where the iron dollar rested. He bunched his fists. His shoulders lifted and encompassed his neck with thick folds of muscle.

"I go," he said. "You stay there. Don't move away. I kill you like I kill your father. He robbed me. He paid me one dollar for two years on his hell-ship."

"Are you a sailor?"

"*Ja!*"

"And you came here—climbed through the window to kill my father?"

"*Ja!* I kill him all right. He's dead in there."

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Steve's eyes smoldered with sullen light as he pointed toward the shapeless body on the floor.

"How can that be?"

The Dane caught the note of doubt in the girl's voice.

"*Ja*, I kill him," he said.

"Why, you couldn't have killed my father."

"*Ja!* The man who sent me here said it was your father. He showed me the window. He said——"

The girl disappeared in her bedroom. She stepped swiftly back again. An opera cloak draped from her shoulders. It was the same Steve had seen her wear once before that night.

"If you killed a man in that room," she said, grasping the frame of the door, "it was some one else than my father. He——"

"I go!" said Steve.

"No! Go look and see. See who it was. See if it wasn't one of the servants. Father hasn't——"

The Dane's brain worked slowly. He remembered that there were police in the city. The girl's eagerness might mean that she was preparing a trap for him. She might lock the door after he had entered the dark bedroom.

He hesitated and stared bovinely at her eager face. He eyed the window and the clammy fog that drifted over the housetops of the city. He closed and opened his ham-like fists.

"Go, see!" she commanded. "My father didn't come home with me."

Steve swung around and strode through the door. He stooped over the body. He found a broken match in the upper pocket of his jersey. He struck this along his dungaree trousers. It flared a yellow spot in the black. He stared down at the twisted and tortured face of the Dropper. There was no mistaking the pipe-stem neck with its red garroting marks.

The match burned to the end of the broken stick. It blistered the Dane's fingers. He held the charred remnant. By the glow of the cinder he saw the scattered tools about an iron chest—the evidence of a trap which the Dropper had been setting for him had he bungled into the mansion at three o'clock.

Steve strode over the rug and loomed in the doorway. He did not notice the waiting girl. He passed her with his eyes downcast. He climbed out the window. He reached for the waterspout and vines. He descended, hand under hand, like a great red ape. He crossed the stone court and the short, dewy grass.

The way down the hill was calculated to take him to the nearest water. He walked lankily out to the end of a long wharf. A tall ship was gliding by. It was going through the Golden Gate.

He found a boatman asleep in the stern of a dinghy. He pointed to the tall ship after awakening the man.

"You take me to it?" he asked.

The boatman nodded and seized the oars.

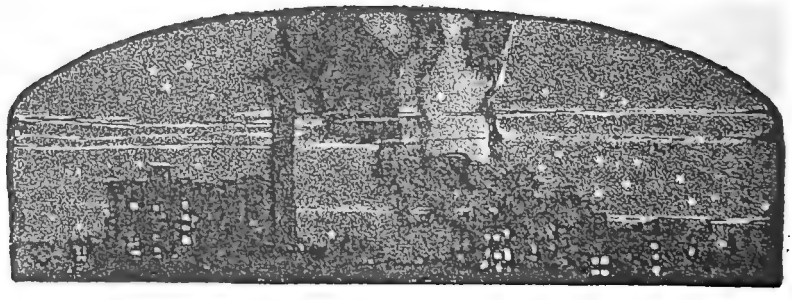
Steve reached upward, as they neared the ship, and started climbing a boatswain's ladder which dangled from the port quarter. He stared at the man in the boat.

"I thank I owe you something before I go out to sea," he said.

"I'll leave that to you, sailor."

The iron dollar dropped like a sinker into the boatman's reaching palm. He gazed at it, then upward.

"Good luck!" he called to the Dane in a voice like a benison.



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THE ARCH-TIGRESS of AUSTRIA

AGNES & EGERTON CASTLE

Author of "The Accursed Town," "The Red Shepherdess," etc.

"FAITH, it is so, *Monsieur le Docteur*——"

In the year 1797—fifth of the republic, now swayed no longer by the truculence of "*Sans-Culottes*" and "*Montagnards*" but by the saner social sense of the *Directoire*—ordinary amenities of speech were not forbidden to French lips, and the occasional use of polite terms of intercourse had happily ceased to be a case for the guillotine.

"Yes—such as you see me, I was once a simple private in that same Irish Brigade. Faith, and proud it is I am to have been of it—when it was the Irish Brigade and not——"

"Not what, *Monsieur le Commandant?*"

The French officer had apparently started upon a new line of thought.

"Devil only knows what, or where, it is by this time! Split up, scattered like chaff among the *Kaiserlicks* and getting well '*schlaged*' for their trouble by the white-coats. With the exception, you'll understand, of my own regiment—Dillon's is the name it was known by then—which is now the 87th Demi-Brigade—and, by the same token, with not above a score of Irish boys left of them."

Thus the *Chef de Bataillon*, Dennis O'Sullivan—in his blue uniform, tarnished silver epaulets. War-worn but with a gallant smartness all his own, he reclined, with every appearance of well-being and complacency, in the leather armchair by the side of the tall china stove, addressing the Herr Doktor Baumetz, the chief notable of Feldberg, that prosperous little town on the southernmost slopes of the Taunus range; from which, in the blue distance, you can get a glimpse of the spires of Frankfort, the Imperial free town.

For the 87th Demi-Brigade was part of the advance-guard of Hoche's conquering Army of the Rhine, which, after methodically thrashing the Imperials at Altenkirchen, Neuwied and sundry other places, had found itself stopped, on the very eve of capturing the capital of Franconia, by the singularly unwelcome news of the "peace preliminaries" of Leoben. Thus was the Army of the Rhine frustrated of its hopes. On the previous night—that is, on April seventh—the Austrian commander in Frankfort had gleefully communicated to the advancing French generals the cessation of active hostilities.

A sense of relief pervaded the invaded countryside. A new, undreamed-of thankfulness filled the heart of "the inhabitant," and, if the feeling were of lesser quality in that of the baffled victors, their Gallic cheerfulness helped them to make the best of a disappointment, which at least spelled for them a period of rest. And now, with a prospect of long and peaceful intercourse, invaders and invaded were already settling down to something that might be called a watchful amity.

The new-model forces of France—welded

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out of the veteran historic regiments, the volunteers of '92 and the conscripts of '95 into a sternly disciplined army—might "live upon the country"—as the military euphemism has it—but in '97 there was little to fear, on their passage, of the systematic looting and the outrages of the savage troops that marched under the Austrian black-and-yellow banner. Truth to say, if, at the back of his thoughts, the Franconian "inhabitant" wished the *Franzos* well out of his land, there could be no doubt as to which he preferred, of two evils, him or the *Kaiserlick*.

At any rate, in Doctor Baumetz's little brown-roofed, green-shuttered house, nestling on the hill slope amid the vineyards, all was geniality, smiling blandness. Outside, far away, the occasional call of sentinels on outpost-work, the roll of distant drums within the bivouac lines sounding the tattoo, were the only notes of war. Inside the well-closed room—for the Spring was still chilly enough—everything spelled comfort, grateful relaxation. The stove, log-filled, snored gently. A shaded lamp illumined the remains of a supper spread on clean napery. The house cat was curled near the warmth in his mysterious meditation.

The officer, in a luxury of repose—his left arm, damaged by the lance of a Hungarian uhlan who now was sleeping his long sleep somewhere by the Neckar's brim, had been freshly bandaged by the *Herr Doktor*—sipping a small glass of right *Kirschwasser*, was in the friendliest of talkative humors.

The *Herr Doktor* himself, in the inevitable indoor attire of your true German—dressing-gown and roomy slippers, a velvet cap sheltering his bald gray head, a long china-bowled pipe in his hand—was philosophically pacing the room—listening.

Dennis O'Sullivan was a man worth listening to: he had the proper Irish gift of the gab. He had always been held in the regiment as a *beau parleur* in the Gallic tongue, which he spoke indeed with a picturesqueness engagingly Hibernian and with far greater ease than the half-forgotten English of his boyhood.

"Faith," he was saying, "the Irish Brigade is no more."

The young commandant—he was barely twenty-seven—was wistfully gazing at the smoky rafters. In that kind of expansive mood with which men in the ripeness of manhood and success are prone at times to hark back to a life gone by, he yearned to extol the wonderful old corps which had had the honor—as he held it—to train him and so many of his forebears in the business of arms. But, among his compeers of the remodeled army, he scarce could expect to find listeners of sympathy. With this host of chance, however, it was another matter.

"It lived," he went on, "lived and died in glory, through a hundred years. Yes, century it is, almost to a day. You are a man of knowledge, *Herr Doktor*, you must know how the King of France, in the old days, Louis XIV, sent regiments of his own to our old Ireland to help us fight for his cousin, the lawful king. You see, we in Ireland held for one king, the English for another. Our king, his cousin, had however to flit back to France; you know that, too, for sure. Well, one day—they say—King James and King Louis were walking, all in their great periwigs, on the Terrace of St. Germain—that's near Paris.

"And says King Louis to his kinsman, 'It's little I am like to see anything more of my regiments I sent over to help you in your island, my cousin!' And King James answers in a grand huff, 'Indeed, never trouble yourself about the matter, my cousin, and see if I do not replace them, and mighty soon, with as many of my own Irish as you will take in exchange.' And, true for you, it was not long before a fine brigade of our fighting boys—Mount Cashels and O'Briens and Dillons and others galore—was in the service of France.

"THAT'S how it was. And it is a fact that the supply never failed—not for a hundred years. I learned all these things, and many others about the old brigade, from our colonel in the *ci-devant* days. Arthur Dillon—I gave him fencing lessons—ah, a proper man, God rest him—they guillotined him in the end! Never stare that way, *Herr Doktor*—we Irish never believed that God was abolished in the year one; though, for a while, we had to keep a precious quiet tongue about Him."

The commandant had brought back his red-brown eyes from their musing contemplation of the rafters. The doctor had stopped a moment in his pacing to gaze

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in wonder at this strange specimen of a warring Republican. The latter presently went on, stretching out his sound arm to replace the glass upon the table.

" 'The Wild Geese' they used to call the boys that flitted—no one able to catch them—across the sea every year. I was one of them. My grandfather and his father and his father before him had been Wild Geese. And my uncle—that was the great Daniel O'Sullivan, the grandest fencer in all the world; he that was master to the King's Academy at Versailles—he sent for me—a hobadehoy I was then—and taught me himself so that there should always be an O'Sullivan to be master of the real fine sword-play.

"I'm thinking there have been great fighters in the Brigade even without mentioning the O'Sullivans—'tis modesty, you know, that's the curse of us Irish boys all the world over! There have been the Lallys and MacMahons and O'Mahoneys and Macdonalds. Macdonald is a general now. He it is who sent the Sassenach Duke of York to the right-about in Flanders and took with infantry—with infantry, *Herr Doktor*, how do you like that?—the whole of the Dutch fleet. True, it was over the ice. *Crébleu*, yes, there have been men and deeds on the roll of the Brigade!

"Not one of the campaigns undertaken by France—and God knows how many there have not been between '69 and the republic—but the redcoats of the Irish dead have dotted like poppies the battlefields of Flanders, of the Netherlands, of Piedmont and Savoy, of Spain and Germany. *Eh, donc!* And of islands far away and American soil. Not one victory for the lilies of France but was helped in the van by the Wild Geese of Ireland.

"And many that would never have been victories at all—tell me now, what of Marsaglia? And Fontenoy? And Laufeldt? But for the Irish boys under the green and red flag. And now it is no more! Why, you will ask yourself, seeing that France has so much need of soldiers? Because it was a king's army, and it could not live on amid the new ideas of '91."

"*Ei, eil*" said the doctor, philosophically puffing at his *kanaster*. "I do not ask myself that. It's *natürlich* enough." His French, of slow, bookish quality, was useful but spoken in that halting, chewing manner which makes *macheur de paille* so descriptive a nickname for German. "Nay, I do not ask myself that but rather how it is that you, so warm a praiser of those king's soldiers——"

"How it is that I am wearing the blue now, instead of the old red, *hein*, Doctor? Well, there's a tale to it. And it's a queer one. And yet it all came, *natürlich* enough—good word that—but in a mighty roundabout way. And since you want to know——"

The commandant rose, fumbled into his vest pocket and produced a black clay pipe.

"Perhaps," he went on, "you'll be good and charge that for me. It's the worst of that tied up arm; I never can fill my old *bouffarde* myself—thank you. Well, no, none of the old regiments, all except Dillon's, would put up with it. When there was a talk—that was after the flight of the king—of reforming the Irish corps, sending the officers packing, drafting the men into French numbers, doing away with their beloved flag—their flag, no less—why the Wild Geese flitted again, eastward this time, to join Condé across the Rhine.

" 'Twas the time they were quartered near the frontier. Berwick's was the first to go. One fine morning McCarthy-Lyragh simply marched them from Givet into the *Kaiserlick* country. Two steps across, you see. Whatever may have befallen the officers, I misdoubt the boys have not had much cause to rejoice since. They thought—*natürlich*—they would still be serving the king: it was the driven slaves of Austrian archdukes they became, under the white-coat! Well, well, I won't judge them. Indeed and it's not for me to judge, seeing what I did myself. And the only ones that stayed, the boys of Dillon's, did not fare much better in the end.

"They were still quartered at Lille—'92. That was the first of the terrible years, and you, Doctor, must look on all that took place then just as a fearful sickness—fever, delirium. The country is sound again, now, and strong. But that was just awful!

"But now I'll tell you—I was of those who stuck to the regiment. Though most of the officers had left us to join the others across the way, our colonel, Theobald Dillon, had stuck to France. In '92, as you know, the white-coats were overrunning Flanders, and he was not the man

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to rat—though it would have been better for him if he had. Well, well, it is all a beastly tale. I'll only tell you just enough of it to explain how I, an O'Sullivan whose forbears from the first had fought for France, came to find myself—oh, only for a short while, six months barely—on the opposite side.

"THEOBALD DILLON went out from Lille, that April morning of '92, to watch the advancing *Kaiserlicks*. He had orders not to engage, only to keep touch. That meant steady retiring. The troops, however, did not know it. And the sickness, as I said, was already in them: suspicion, suspicion everywhere. Ah, they should have known a Dillon better! The cry went round that we were betrayed by the king's officers. Then came the panic.

"Yes, Doctor, a panic in front of those Austrians whom we have ever, before and since, so soundly drubbed—it makes me hot to this day to think of it! Pell-mell we fell back within our lines at Lille. And then the rabble took it up. Our Dillon—as intrepid a man, as high-souled—was dragged from his horse, torn to pieces—they hanged his remains! Then came the turn of the rest. It was the rabble, I tell you. The boys had no hand in it. No, the Irish boys had no hand in it, that I will swear. I think I can swear to it."

Dennis O'Sullivan hesitated a moment, gazing past his hearer, his still unlit pipe poised in the air. Then, with a shrug, as if to dismiss a haunting thought, he went on, stooping to light a spill at the door of the stove:

"Anyhow, 'tis all done with. There is no more Irish Brigade. But I could not stand it. No, I could not stand it. You see, *Monsieur le Docteur*, I was very young then. I loved the man. If that was the way they treated a loyal soldier—well, the boys of Berwick's and Ormond's were in the right of it, thought I. That night, in the confusion—and it was hell in Lille, those days—I slipped through the lines. And the next morning I was in Belgium.

"Yes, my faith, a deserter, I—O'Sullivan—a deserter to those *Kaiserlicks* yonder—" he pointed with his pipe toward the window overlooking the Frankfort side—"who are now bleating for peace, *crêbleu*, just as we were about to round them in! My word, that General Bonaparte, away over the Alps at his Leoben, has taken a lot upon himself! With him there, if he had only gone on, and our Hoche here, we would have had the whole bagful of them—aye, between finger and thumb, *tare an ouns!*"

"No doubt, no doubt," said the doctor, suppressing under a wry smile a trifle of resentment. "But you? You might have been in the bagful, as you say, whereas——"

The Irishman laughed and blew, with much self-satisfaction, a voluminous cloud.

"Whereas, you mean, I am now on the thumb side, eh? Well, now, perhaps it's worth the telling.

"Once with the Austrians, I got more of shove-along and rough tongue than of thanks. Ah, sure, the Belgians must be giving praise by now to have been ridded of the Imperial protectors! I had a taste of barrack-jail, too, and of flat-of-the-saber. *Och, mille diabls*—that's Irlandese again for you, *Herr Doktor*—if I had the fellows with those same sabers on a convenient ten paces worth of level ground, *nom d'une pipe!* But, as I kept saying along the road that I was due to rejoin the Comte de Provence, they had to let me free to tramp my way to Coblenz.

"And there, the idling emigrated officers—jackanapes they seemed to me, now, somehow, that's the truth; and indeed it was a pitiful figure they cut in their fine tatters, keeping up their airs and graces among the swaggering Austrians—they were glad enough to have Dennis O'Sullivan to give them something to play at in the fencing-room, with *pointe* and *contrepointe* of the natty French school. But it was not a life at all. And I thought it would be fine to get back, by hook or crook, to old Ireland, come what might of it, since the Irish Brigade was played out. That, however, never came off, as you see, since I am tonight with the advantage of drinking this superior *schnapps* of yours. And, by your leave, I'll have just the least taste more of it."

With an engaging smile at his host, the commandant refilled his glass.

"No, it did not come off, as I say. And I am glad of it. But I had it strong on my mind when something that looked like a real good step toward it came my way. I had a pupil, I must tell you—the only one, by the same token, among my many,

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who seemed to have any money worth talking about in his breeches' pocket—so I took extra care of him. There's no denying it, in those days most of us French, on either side, looked more like scarecrows than soldiers. I had nothing to live on but what I made.

"Well, that one I am speaking of, the Vicomte de Chasseforet—a pretty dolly—tells me one morning, when we hung the foils back after the lesson, that he is going to Ghent, to be on the *suite* as a something-or-other representative of the Comte de Provence, of the Duke of Saxe-Teschen—the Austrian governor of the Low Countries, as you know.

" 'Sorry for that, *M. le Vicomte*,' says I, rather damped by the news. My one profitable pupil, you see.

" 'And, what's more,' he goes on, tying his lace cravat, 'you're coming with me. *Oh-Sous-le-vent*, my lad—' that was the name they had for me, you must know. The French soldier, in the old days, always had his sobriquet. He never was Jacques Duval, or Mathieu Guérin, or Joseph Mouton, but *La Tulipe*, or *Brin d'Amour* or *Brise-Fer*, or something. They called me *'Oh-Sous-le-vent,'* which does not sound far wrong from the good old name and meant, which was true enough, that I came from where the good wind blows. Now, however, *Citoyen Commandant* is the word."

And the *citoyen commandant* twisted his mustache conqueringly.

" 'Ah,' says I, a bit startled, 'and in what capacity, *M. le Vicomte?*'

" 'In attendance on me, I suppose,' says he carelessly. Then—I must have grown red with thought of an O'Sullivan going as servant—he adds, laughing in my face, 'Make it, if you like, that the duke wants a fencing-master. But with me you come. It's in orders. You've been selected.'

"Suddenly up jumps the idea in my cranium. 'Begorrah, good for you, Dennis, my boy!' Ghent, you see, would bring me near enough to some seaport, and then, *Oh-Sous-le-vent*, the Wild Goose, would spread his wings. 'If it is orders,' says I dutifully, 'I am ready.'

"MY LITTLE sawny of a *vicomte* has me rigged out brand new. Respectable, but, odd—respectable civilian. I couldn't make out why. But it suited my game well enough: I said nothing. And, after three days' gentle posting—my *vicomte* didn't care overmuch for violent exertion—we got to Brussels. There we had the first news of the Battle of Valmy and how Dumouriez had sent the Prussians trotting back to the Rhine. It seems the Chasseforet youth had found new directions at Brussels, for, the next day, as we were trundling on the high road, I found that we were not for Ghent at all—where I meant to have given my man the go-by—but for Tournay. 'There's poor luck, but never mind!' thinks I. 'It means only a little more tramping, and at least they speak French here.'

"But at Tournay every road and village was filled with white-coats. Thick, busy as ants. And there we began to hear a mighty rumble of powder in the west. We did not stop. And where, think you, did we alight that evening—but at Hellemes, just outside Lille? And in the middle of the biggest roar of guns ever heard—and I have heard plenty of the kind since.

"Then I learned the true hang of the whole matter; how the Austrians, thoroughly upset by the rout of Brunswick in the Argonne, at that same Valmy, were trying to seize Lille—the keystone, you'll understand, of our defenses in the north. There was no time for a regular siege or blockade—I have learned that since; but what I saw of it even that first night told plainly enough what the game was.

"The duke—Saxe-Teschen, the beast's name—thought he could reduce the town by terror. Hoped to give the people such a dosing of bomb, red-shot and stinkpot that they would force the governor to open the door. He had his artillery—mortars, *grosses pièces*, howitzers, the whole siege-train *tremblement* of the Netherlands—to speak at once. He meant it short and strong and reckoned on three days at most of hell to force a surrender!

"The garrison was weak: mainly national guards and a few odd remnants of real soldiers—my own 87th forming the best of it. The Irish boys of the 87th! What I felt inside me here—" Dennis O'Sullivan struck the red revers covering his heart—"thinking, all of a sudden, that I stood within a mile of them, on the side of those *Kaiserlich* guns barking ten to one at the comrades inside. I hope I may never feel the like of it again! Sure, I know I never

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will. Anyhow it did not last long, and you'll hear why, in a minute.

"We were waiting, my little ass of a *vicomte* and I, just alighted from the chaise at the outposts. It was nightfall. Two thousand paces over there, behind the ramparts the black old town showed bright blazes in scores of patches. And the roof of smoke over it glinted back red and yellow. They had already been their three days at it! Chasseforet was grinning like a monkey, amused. But never a word for me. I was glad of it. At last a dragoon of Teschen, in his brass and white, comes trotting up to the carriage and champs at us that we are to follow him to his high-mightiness the duke's quarters behind the lines.

"It was full night when we got there. The duke, they said, and all his staff and the ladies—the ladies, if you will notice—were all in the great mortar trenches at Fives. It was odd enough to hear of the governor of the Netherlands himself walking the trenches at night; but the ladies! And yet it is as I tell you. I have seen it with these eyes. I knew Fives, a village on the road to Tournay. The way to it was called the Chemin des Guinguettes, for it was one long road of *guinguettes*, arbors, dram-shops and dancing-booths—the playground of the garrison, in the old days.

"Now they had cut an approach to a deep parallel, so deep and covered that it was as safe as this room. And Lille had no mortars, I remember, capable of reaching it: the place was poorly armed. And the *Kaiserlick* knew that, too, evidently—for whom do you think we found there, picking their way about with dainty shoes, attended by spick and span officers, behind those great toads of twelve-inch mortars? Half a dozen ladies of the court, all in silk and fur, lace hoods over their powdered hair—just as if they had walked out of a ballroom into the garden!

"The fire had not been opened yet in that particular trench, but the gunners stood, stiff and smart, by their pieces. And on a gabion was placed—believe that, if you can, *Herr Doktor*, while in the town yonder five hundred homes were afire, and every minute no doubt a woman or a child was being torn up by a shell or stifled by fire-smoke—on a gabion there was a great tray spread with white linen and crystal and silver.

"Refreshments! I have sometimes thought since," said Dennis O'Sullivan, "that if it had not been for this idea of the *Archi-Tigresse d'Autriche*, to come down into the trench at Fives, why, Saxe-Teschen might perhaps have succeeded in driving Lille to surrender. The Arch-Tigress? Ah, yes, I'll tell you. The chief lady, that night in the mortar trench, was Marie-Christine, Archduchess of Austria, the daughter of Kaiser Francis, the sister of Marie Antoinette, wife to the Duke of Saxe-Teschen. And when the story of her night's work came to be told in the town, it was *'l'Archi-Tigresse'* on every lip. Yes, I repeat it, but for what I saw and heard during that hour, the Lillois might have given in the next day.

"SHE was moving about on her husband's arm, waited on by the artillery general, asking this and that about the great mortars—twelve of them, each with its heaps of bombs on either side. She was laughing. She was amused, delighted! The other ladies in attendance were chattering, coquetting with the gilt officers, but the *Archi-Tigresse* was all to the coming surprize in store for those miserable Lillois. The red-hot shot and the howitzer shells were all they had tasted up to then, in that banquet of three days. Very good. They were still to make acquaintance with the twelve-inch bombs, aye, and the sulfur *carcasses*.

"That was a new invention. She must hear the smallest detail: how it would be impossible to breathe within twenty yards of the burning brimstone; how, wherever one fell into a building, or even a narrow street, all living beings were doomed to perish—in agonies! The artillery officer was drawing the long bow a bit, but he saw the idea pleased the Arch-Tigress, and he piled it on for her with a vengeance. My *vicomte* had joined the noble party and was all absorbed in his bowing and scraping. He had given me no orders; so I stood by, where he had left me, and stared and listened, all with that grip of indignation at the heart. Presently, the duke having called him up, he looks round for me and signs me to draw nearer.

" 'Here, your Serene Highness,' he says, 'is a man who knows the town thoroughly. He was one of Dillon's. I brought him from Coblenz. He might be useful——'

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"And now I knew—I might have guessed before—why I had been selected. My blood went round and round; I felt myself redden all over my body. And yet, the insult to that same O'Sullivan blood served me in good stead. 'They want to make a spy of you, Dennis,' thinks I. 'Do they, by God! Now is the time for open eyes and close counsel.' But his highness only flung me a serene look—so absent that it did not seem even to see me. 'Yes,' says his insolence, 'we will make use of him,' and he goes on with what he was explaining to his Marie-Christine.

" 'You see, *ma très-chère*—' that's what he called his Christine—'the only pity is that, from this side, we can not reach the farther quarters of the town. There, to the west—' he was moving his finger along a plan—'the quarters of St. Catherine and St. Magdeleine. Ah, if we could only get at them with some of these jewels, the thing would be over by tomorrow. The place would not be tenable. They'd squeal for surrender before noon. St. Magdeleine especially, it's the most populous center. Is it not so, you, the Irishman?' he says, bringing down his look on me.

"The white-coated devil! A handsome man, you'd have thought him; by his looks, ready to bless everybody, like a bishop. St. Magdeleine! I suddenly bethought me 'tis where Marie-Rose lived, *mavourneen*—that's Irlandese for 'my darling'—a sweetheart of mine. If a soldier could marry, I would—and she would have been glad, I knew. Anyhow, it gave me a fresh dig at the heart. And a kind of thought that was already in me, foggy and shapeless, became all at once something solid. But I answered, as if nothing in Lille mattered to me:

" 'Yes—thick as a beehive.' And that pleased him, the beast! 'Good,' says he, 'the beehive will be duly sulfured tomorrow. Yes, we'll sulfur it well!' and he goes on to the Tigress, talking over my listening ears like the fool he was and turning back to his map. 'It is only put off for a day, *très chère*. Our good Count Hohenlohe has already realized the matter. He's running a surprize trench at this very moment, there, behind the *Cimetière*. And, while we keep them amused with these toys, another set of them is finding its way into it. And, well, tomorrow morning, at sunrise, St. Catherine and St. Magdeleine will be drawn into the dance. But now, *très-chère* and you mesdames—since you would see the fireworks, it is time.'

"At this the cackling birds began to draw away, covering their ears with their hands, nestling against each other. But not the archduchess.

" 'Let me!' she cries, with a merry laugh. 'Let me send the first bomb over to the Jacobins, to the monsters. Yes, I will!'

"And, yes, sir, she did it! I saw her stuff her ears with the wool an officer handed to her. I saw her take the linstock from the gunner and fire the first piece. You don't perhaps know what a screaming thunder comes out of a mortar. Cannon is small potatoes to it. She gave a shriek and a leap back and fell on her knee. But up she jumped again, laughing like a madwoman. 'No—I'll fire them all, once!' And off she goes to the next piece, just as the gunner was bending to the touch-hole, and she fires that, too! And the next! But at number four she stops and puts her white hands with the glinting rings to her temples:

" 'Oh, my head aches,' she whimpers but still smiles. That smile, *Herr Doktor!* It was like a white cat licking her lips. 'Take me back,' she says. And all the gilded officers surround her.

"Teschen, very tender, leads her, gently scolding. My *vicomte*, bowing hither and thither, helps the other powdered flock through the trenches. And all the while, one after the other, up fly the bombs, snorting like devils, to crash away through the old roofs of Lille. And I follow—the same thoughts twirling round and round in my head. The boys, within yonder—Marie-Rose, the darling—her highness' headache—the new battery behind the *Cimetière*—duly sulfured tomorrow. St. Magdeleine, and Marie-Rose, *mavourneen!* Her highness' headache.

"I DISREMEMBER altogether making up my mind to anything, but once in the open country, whilst the Arch-Tigress and her bevy were being helped into their carriages, Dennis O'Sullivan slips behind a hedge and away. It was pitch black night, and all the lantern-bearers were gathered around the *partie de plaisir*. No one paid attention to me.

"I knew the country well, and, besides,

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the glare of the burning town was beacon enough. It took me three hours to come round by a wide turn to the south side. 'I will try the Porte de Bethune,' I was saying to myself. And, 'Oh, my head aches,' and, 'Yes, we'll sulfur it well,' coming back like a buzzing wasp about my ears.

"The town, I have explained, *Herr Doktor*, was not regularly invested. Only a few patrols prowling about the roads and fields. In the blackness I dodged them easily enough. But, nearing the Bethune outworks, one of them spotted me.

"'*Wer da?*' cries the *Kaiserlick*. No answer of course. Then a few shots in the direction of my whereabouts. And, in another minute, splash I drop into the ditch of the ravelin.

"'*Qui vive?*' from the main rampart. This time I answer:

"'France! *Messager!*'

"'Stand where you are,' cries the sentry—a national guard, and a fool at that. I, you may believe, was not for remaining in the water, and I clamber up the berm and over the parapet—safe from the *Kaiserlick's* fire, anyhow. But the *bourgeois* guard fires from his side, the ball flopping into the water behind me.

"'*Imbécile!*' I cry. 'France, I tell you, and messenger.' I could not think of anything else. 'I must see the place commandant. And at once, *clampin!*'

"'Well, well, one comes,' he grunts. And I wait, dripping, counting the bombs from the Arch-Tigress' trench. They were still dropping beyond yonder: one could tell them easily from the other fire. And, at last, four men and a sergeant with a torch come out through the postern. And they collar me.

"'Now we will hear,' says the sergeant.

"'No time to hear,' I answer. 'What I've got to say is for the town commandant. And brisk is the word,' says I.

"So they pass me in through the inner works—a fine place of arms is Lille, if it had a real garrison—then through the streets filled with the women and children that had fled from the bombarded quarters. That end of the town, as the Duke had smilingly said to his tender wife, was out of reach of the guns, but one could hear the clamor and the roar of the fires and the bursts, big and small, at the other side. And, faith, when we got there, the sight was heart-breaking! It was not war on soldiers but on the population—yet there was no daunting them!

"'When St. Catherine and St. Magdeleine have a taste of it, they'll soon squeal for surrender,' the Teschen brute had said. Surrender, squealing, was it? Devil a squeal! They fought, one and all: men, young and old, civilians and soldiers and women, too, just as if it had been a battlefield—fought the fire, the tumbling roofs, removed the wounded and the dead from the ruins, quenched the red-shot. The things one saw—dragging the fuses from spluttering shell, as often as not being blown up in the task, lifting out the red-shot with pincers or shovels to drop them into buckets. But surrender? *Nom d'un chien*, the Saxe-Teschens were out of their reckoning!

"You know, Doctor, there are at times evil blasts and heroic blasts that come over people. The evil blast of April was gone—gone over to the side of the Arch-Tigress. In the Lille of October there was nothing but heroism. And, faith, it will be talked of in ages to come.

"We found the town commandant—General Guischard, fine old boy—in the Grande Place with a few orderly officers that came and went. He was receiving reports and giving orders, cool as a cucumber, but grim, oh grim, while shell and hot shot swished overhead or bounded on the pavement. He had his table laid out in the middle of the square, with a couple of lanterns and his map of the town spread, with his pistols as paperweights, for it was blowing in fits. I can see him still, pacing to and fro, his hands behind his back: a tubby little man with great brown whiskers, bushy eyebrows, his old cocked hat square over them, and his great thick cue bobbing behind over his collar.

"'What's this?' he growls as he saw the national guards with fixed bayonets bringing me along. 'Ah, bah!' he cries then. 'What the devil! If it isn't Oh-*Sous-le-vent!* Oho, deserter, I remember—so, my lad, we've got you—again? Well, no time now. Perhaps tomorrow we'll see to your business. March!'

"'*Citoyen Général*,' I cry quickly. 'Deserter, yes. But come back, as you see. Come back right through the *Kaiserlicks*—to give you news. Shoot me tomorrow. But tonight listen to what I have to say.

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Have you heard what they're about, behind the *cimetière?*'

" 'The *cimetière?* What, what? Ah, *Sacrebleu!*' He seemed to guess at once. 'Let him go, you others. We must look into that. Come, quick with it!'

"And he listens to me now, with his small eyes boring through me.

" 'If you speak truth, *Oh-Sous-le-vent,*' he says, as soon as I had rattled out all I knew, 'your case will be different to-morrow. Yes, very different. But if it's a trick—*tonnerre!*' Then, struck with an idea, 'Capitaine la Flèche,' he calls, 'stay here. Any one who wants me, tell him I'll be back in half an hour. Ah—and just hand me that telescope. And you, lad, come along.'

"He had taken up his pistols. He passed one into his belt and kept the other ready cocked in his hand—he was a man of sense, General Guischard.

" 'Don't let me suspect a trick,' he says, with a look at me under his eyebrows. 'You understand!' And, telling me to take up the lantern, away he marches toward the old church of St. Magdeleine, which is near the ramparts.

"THE church was full of women and children and old people. He pushes his way through them and up through the steeple's stairs. From the top, over the great bell-chamber, the view of the blazing side of the town was terrible, but at our end there was nothing but blackness. He made me repeat my account while he peered through his glass out of the north window. My teeth were clacking like castanets with cold. Up in the sky, between those windows, in my wringing clothes—you may imagine!

" 'Eh, eh!' he says, at last. 'I begin to believe you, *Oh-Sous-le-vent.* And, devil take me, it's worth knowing! Look.'

"I looked. Away over there, in the one dip of the ground—that wily Hohenlohe seemed to know the place better than our own commander—a dip of the ground that could not be overlooked from the main rampart but well open to view from the steeple—there were now dots of light innumerable, just like what you might see at a fair, by night.

" 'Yes, yes—the sly *gredins!* Working away! Moles and rats! Yes, but, now we know, it makes a little difference! They little think we know.' At this he turns round on me. *'Oh-Sous-le-vent'*. he says, putting his great paw on my shoulder—and, in the light of the lantern I held up, his rough face was all changed, and so was his voice—*'Oh-Sous-le-vent,* my friend, you will have well deserved of Lille—and of the republic! Now we know the game, we shall take a hand. We have still the time to play our *manche.* Eh, eh—' his great red cheeks trembled with excitement—'if we have no mortars that can reach as far as Hellemes, we have plenty that can drop the plums on the *cimetière.* Ready at sunrise, did he say? *Tonnerre!*' He closed the telescope with a snap. 'But we have six good hours, we others here. We'll serve him breakfast not at sunrise but at dawn! And now let us march.'

"And, I leading with the light, we began our descent. On what mere chance, good or bad, do great results depend! Had we begun that descent ten seconds later, the news on which so much hung never would have been acted upon. And Lille might—I do not say it would, but it might—have fallen. And, with the Imperials in the place, the whole campaign of Flanders would have failed. We had barely passed out of the bell-chamber, when the biggest of them—a great *bourdon* that would half-fill this room—gave, over our heads, a clang like fallen thunder.

"Never was such a sound. It was a roar and with it a crash, something like a living shriek! Then one could hear the pieces of bronze and stones and timber tumbling about. In St. Magdeleine, we were out of range of direct fire, but this shot was a freak. A round shot—one of the great thirty-twos—that had bounded off the granite curb of the Place d'Armes, right over the houses, up to the belfry window, splintering the bell, just a moment after we had been squeezing our way past it. They still talk of that shot at Lille, the longest of the whole bombardment.

" 'That's what I call lucky,' says the general, chuckling, as we went down the corkscrew stair four at a time, and that was all.

AND now, what they achieved within that town, under fire, during those six hours, which—through my doing, be it said—were still their own, is a bit of a marvel. Every mortar within the

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ramparts was moved to the crown-work of St. Magdeleine. That was the nearest to the *cimetière*. It was a job which in ordinary days would have taken a week at least. But every one lent a hand who could, at dragging and pushing and lifting—with the burning houses to light the work. They were not of big caliber, these mortars of ours, but there were twenty-eight of them.

"Well, on the Magdeleine side, by six in the morning all was loaded and ranged for the *cimetière*—and not one of the *Kaiserlicks* dreaming of it! Our very first salvo capsized the whole of their pretty arrangements. This time it was the artillery commandant who was up in the belfry. After an hour, just about the time when the Teschen had announced the sulfuring was to begin, the order was passed along to cease the fire. Down he comes, his telescope under his arm, rubbing his hands; there was nothing left standing in their battery, he says. And they had more than a whiff of their own sulfur, it seemed, for the whole emplacement was evacuated.

"Great joy, you may conceive, about St. Magdeleine. For my account of what was to have been done on that side had already spread like smoke. And, by the same token, so had the story of the archduchess' delight in opening the fire. A new version of that Paris song, 'Madame Veto.' You don't know the song? Well, the Parisians, after the attack on the Tuileries, in August that year when the Swiss Guard was wiped out, were specially furious against the queen. They believed it was she who always incited the king to resist the people. They called her Madame Veto.

"Madame Veto avait promis
De faire égorger tout Paris—

"It ran, to a tune. Not much of a tune, but every one knew it. Well, now, the Lillois, as they hauled the guns through their topsy-turvy town, were chanting a new turn of it, with Marie-Christine instead of Marie-Antoinette. I sometimes hear it still in my head.

"L'Archi Tigresse—ell a juré
De faire flamber notre Lille.
Mais son vilain coup va manquer,
Grace aux canons de la ville.

"That was all the squealing Teschen had on it! But, meanwhile, the pounding from the old lines at Hellemes was going on more wickedly than ever. It was a rage. No one, within, knew then what was learned later, that Teschen, hearing of Dumouriez's march to the north, was already thinking of taking his *poudre d'escampette*, as we call it, and that his bombardment was now nothing but spite. But if they had known it—what difference could it have made? Giving in to the Arch-Tigress—ah bah! The whole town was grinning.

"Now I'll tell you just one thing I saw, early in the morning. After working all through the night amid the smoke, I suddenly thought I had earned the right to go back to the Magdeleine end—where Marie-Rose was living. She would be glad to see me returned—and safe from the firing platoon, as I could assure her, seeing what I had done for Lille. The thought pleased me so much I started at a trot.

"But, in the Cour Mahieu—a queer little three-cornered place—just as I was turning into it, down flops a bomb, plump in the middle, knocking in the front of half a dozen houses. I was blown down flat as a leaf. Three people were killed, dead as mutton. A crowd of others rushed out from under the crumbling roofs. One of them, Dirk Maes—he was only a hairdresser, but his name will go down to the ages—out he comes, with soap and razor still in his hand, a towel on his arm. He turns round, looks at his smashed shop-front, and gives a great laugh:

"'*Bon!*' he cries. 'Beards done in the open today, *citoyens*, that's all!'

"He brings out a broken chair and props it up against a rag of wall. He spies you out a big shard of bomb stuck in the masonry—it was one of the Hellemes once, twelve inches.

"'*Bon!*' he says again. 'Here's the shaving-dish today. And, *cristi*, you there,' he cries to a boy who was carrying out a steaming pail—they had them, as I told you, to tilt the red-shots into, in every house—'*cristi*, don't waste that hot water, I want it! Who's first?' he cries, waving his bomb dish.

"That man, *Herr Doktor*, shaved fourteen citizens that morning among the ruins, with iron, hot and cold, flying about like swallows. I was the first in the chair.

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Raced for it—for every one wanted to be shaved out of the bomb. That was the way they took things at Lille. I was dry enough, by this time, but grimy is but a small word for what I must have looked like—and I was going to see Marie-Rose——"

Dennis O'Sullivan stopped abruptly. And for a long while he remained silent, sucking at his cold clay dreamily. At last, the doctor, pausing in his bear-pacing, touched him on the arm with the stem of his own long pipe.

"Well," he asked, not without sympathy, "Marie-Rose, your *mavourneen?*"

The younger man shook himself as one may who tries to dismiss a pain from his thoughts:

"I HAD thought her safe, away there, by the canal—I ought to have known she was not of those who keep snug in safety when there's work to be done, among wounded, among sick or old people under fire. They had brought her back, her and her father, dead both. The old mother let me see them, each on their bed. A splinter of shell was in her pretty head, through her gold fair hair. Dead, but serene as a picture. And I thought of the Arch-Tigress' smile and her 'Oh, my head aches!'

"Well, well, now," the young commandant went on in another tone, "that was five years ago. What you wanted to know was how, having worn the red coat in the old order of things, I was now in the blue. That's how it was. You see, there was those devilish white-coats to fight. Guischard had me looked for, the next day.

" 'It seems it was all a mistake,' he says, grinning at me jovially—he was jubilating: there were already signs of Teschen preparing to sheer off. 'A simple mistake in the books, about posting you deserter. I have had it rectified—had it put down prisoner of war returned to duty. Understood? Thou art back on the muster-roll of the 87th. March!'

"I was in time for Jemmapes, where we hustled the *Kaiserlick* along as the Prussian had been at Valmy—and I got my epaulet straight away—they were in want of real men for officers, you see. Anyway, I did not play the Wild Goose home. Happily! Hoche is younger than I. Macdonald just one year older. You see what I mean? But for that armistice with the white-coats—bah! It won't hold out long. There's more work ahead. Anyhow, *Herr Doktor*, I'll admit I am this day in good quarters."

And Dennis O'Sullivan, yawning and stretching himself with much significance, demanded to be shown to his room. And, possibly, he dreamed of Marie-Rose, *mavourneen!* Or yet of the *Archi-Tigresse* and her smile and the called-up memories. Or possibly again, in the prophetic way of dreams, of a General Count O'Sullivan who was to be heard of in later years among the creations of the emperor—and, in virtue of his old association with Dillons, not disavowed by the returning Bourbons

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TOM SMITH

ABIT OF THE OLD WEST

BY E.A.BRININSTOOL

Author of "The Jesse James Gang," "Billy the Kid," etc

THE nerviest frontier marshal that ever conquered a border town and its lawless desperado element without the aid of either six-shooter, rifle or any means of defense save his two fists, was Thomas J. Smith, who served as marshal of Abilene, Kansas, from May, 1870, until he was killed in November of that year. He was paid the largest salary ever received by a peace officer in Abilene—two hundred and twenty-five dollars a month and one half of all fines paid in.

In 1869 Abilene was one of the wildest and woolliest of all the frontier towns of the far West. Lawlessness and disorder raged rampant, and everything was wide open—and then some. Finally, in 1869, Abilene was incorporated as a town, and the office of town marshal was created. Tom Smith was almost the first applicant for the job. He was then living in Kit Carson, Colorado. However, Smith's application was rejected, and local talent substituted. All were failures, and conditions grew worse than ever. The law was openly defied and hooted at. The mayor was derided and ridiculed, and threats were made against his life. The chief of police of St. Louis was appealed to, and two men were sent from that city to try their hand. One day was enough for the pair, and they left town on the midnight train.

At last Tom Smith was wired for. He came and, when told of the situation and asked if he could handle the tough element, smiled grimly and "reckoned he could." His plans were inquired into, and he said the first plan was that all firearms must be given up. This was a good idea, but could it be carried into effect? Tom Smith said it could.

"When do you want to begin?" Mayor Henry asked Smith.

"Right now," was the cool reply.

Smith took the oath of office and started in to conquer Abilene. He was a man who never carried a gun, never drank, gambled, swore or uttered even a vulgar phrase. His first encounter was with a cowboy desperado known as "Big Hank." Hank had boasted loudly and long that no marshal of Abilene or any other town could ever disarm him. Tom Smith quietly walked up to the "terror" and calmly said—

"I'll trouble you for your gun."

Hank refused with an oath. The same quiet demand was repeated and again refused with abuse. Instantly Smith's right arm shot out, and Big Hank went down as if hit with a broad-ax. Smith quietly appropriated the bully's gun and ordered him to leave town at once. Hank stood not upon the order of his going but hit the high spots as fast as he knew how.

News of the new marshal's first victory spread like wild-fire. A burly cow-puncher in a camp on Chapman Creek made a bet that he would defy Smith and retain possession of his gun. "Wyoming Frank" was this alleged bad 'un's cognomen. Next morning he was on hand early, loaded for bear. Smith was a bit late in arising, whereat Wyoming leeringly remarked that

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"the new marshal probably heered I wuz in town and wuz lyin' low." However, Smith soon made his appearance on the street, where an immense crowd had congregated to watch proceedings. The bully soon confronted Smith and started ridiculing him before the assemblage.

Smith at once walked up to Wyoming and demanded his six-shooter. The bully began to back away, but Smith kept close at his side so there was no chance for the "bad-man" to pull his gun. Both men finally backed into a saloon, where the cowboy stopped short in the middle of the room and applied a vile name to Smith. Quick as a wink Smith's terrible right arm again went out, and down went the bully. The new marshal calmly pulled the cowboy's gun and belabored him over the head with it until his face resembled a raw beefsteak. Then, arising, he said in those quiet, even tones—

"I'll give you just five minutes to get out of town."

At this instant the saloonkeeper stepped forward and, addressing Smith, exclaimed:

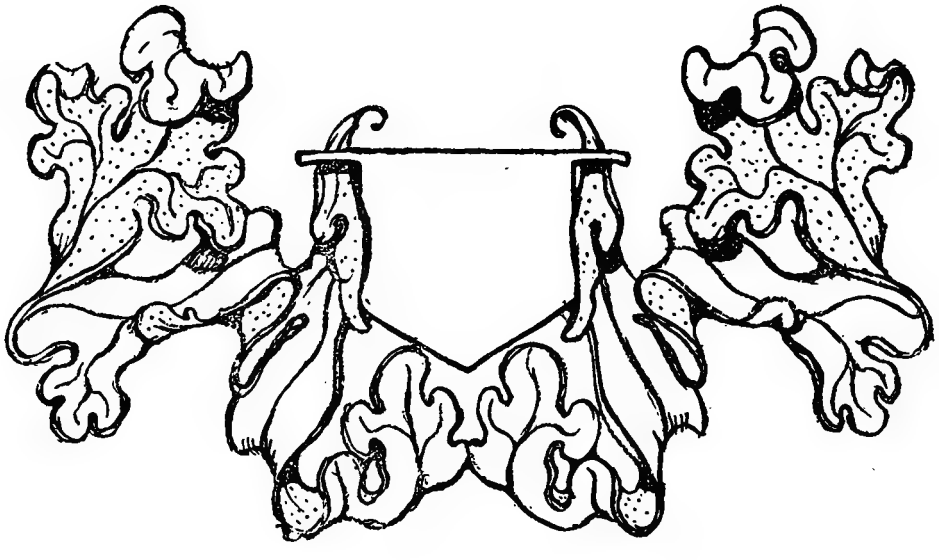
"That's the nerviest thing I ever saw done. You did your duty, and that cuss got just what he needed. Here's my gun. I don't reckon any one will need to pack one while you are marshal here."

Instantly the whole crowd surged about Smith and handed over their guns, complimenting him for his nerve and courage.

"Thank you, boys," said Smith, "just hand your guns to the barkeeper to hold for you until you get ready to leave town."

From that day there was no more "gun-toting" openly on the streets of Abilene. Smith was the man of the hour.

On November 2, 1870, Smith was shot and killed while attempting to arrest two men on Chapman Creek suspected of the murder of a man named Shea. One of the gunmen, named McConnell, shot at Smith, and in the scuffle Smith was killed. His death was greatly lamented. All business in Abilene was suspended during his funeral, and practically the entire population followed his body to the grave. In 1904 a monument to his memory was erected by the citizens of Abilene in honor of the bravest, most courageous marshal who ever conquered a wild frontier town without the aid of anything but his two fists and his cool, quiet nerve.



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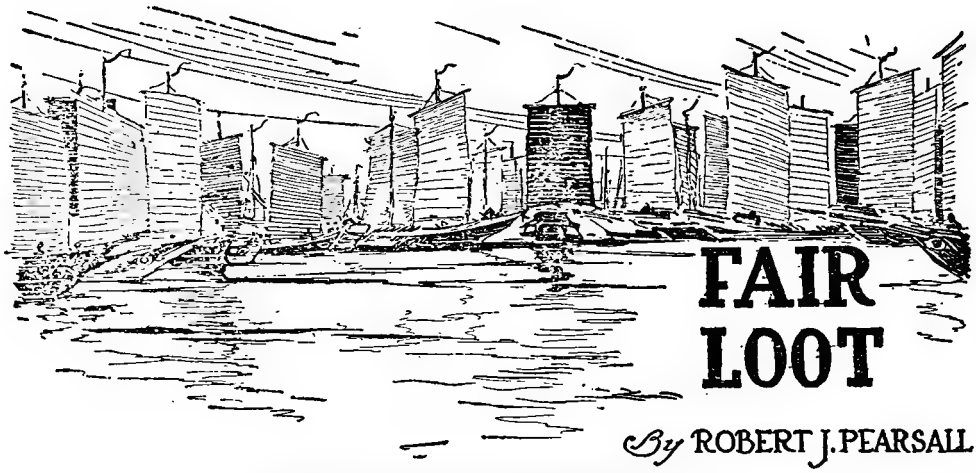

FAIR LOOT

By ROBERT J. PEARSALL

Author of "Rogues' End," "Undue Influence," etc.

KNOWLEDGE is, I think, most often found in unfrequented ways, which is the one reason I was standing that morning on the Pei-Ho River dike of the farming village of Sz-Chuen.

Perhaps once a year a white man came that way, but I'd spent the night there annoyed by no other sign of curiosity than the surreptitious piercing of a peep-hole in the wall of my room—the mask called Eastern phlegm had slipped a minute.

And no one had followed me from the little, brown, mud-walled town except a ragged conjurer, who squatted before me on the dike with his earthen bowl and magic wand.

I'd seen the trick of my fellow itinerant many times before. It was the old one of transforming dry earth into mud by means of the wand, which was apparently solid, and a singsong formula. But it was well done, and at the end I handed him a *tungtse*. Then I turned to the river, which was a wide and lazy stream at this point, dotted with brownish-white junk sails, which stood out very plainly against the light green of the paddy-fields reaching back from the opposite bank.

More interesting to me, however, because I intended to hail one presently, were the junks with bare masts being tracked upstream against wind and current. They were muscular fellows, these trackers, and powerful-voiced, their primitive chanting carrying to me in bursts of song from at least two *li* away—but I was brought back to myself by an apologetic shuffling on the part of the conjurer, whom I thought I had dismissed.

"What do you want?" I asked in Pekingese.

He *ke'towed* almost to the earth, his soiled China-blue blouse falling open with the movement, showing a lean, starved chest.

"Master goes to the north?"

It was an impertinent question, and needless besides, for in that country a white man's course is marked out before as well as behind him.

"Does the river flow south? If you do not know where I go, the naked children of Sz-Chuen are better fakirs than you."

The conjurer bowed again; then he turned his shaved poll and slant eyes sideways till he was looking down-stream.

"From him who sees much that is hidden, plain things are sometimes veiled," he replied in his professional drone, his eyes returning respectfully to the buttons of my khaki coat. "But I smell the coming of another *Megwa* who also goes north this twice memorable day. For that you put this into my hand instead of upon the ground—" he held up the copper coin—"I give you these words: beware of him, for an evil spirit is in him that must be killed."

With that the conjurer backed three paces, bowed ceremoniously, turned and walked rapidly into the village.

Now I was rather impressed by his warning. It must be sincere, for he could have nothing to gain by it, and it was apt to be intelligent, pretenders to occult

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knowledge being usually well informed at least as to what is doing in this world.

If I weren't possessed of considerable curiosity, I'd hardly have been in Sz-Chuen, pursuing a sort of saffron will-o'-the-wisp; so it was with vastly increased interest that I turned again to the yellow river and searched it as far as I could, southward.

Between me and the nearest bend, which was a third of an English mile away, there were two junks, but in neither of them was there any sign of a white man.

I reflected that there were several reasons why I wouldn't welcome the shattering of the illusion that I was the only one of my race within at least a hundred *li*. Also I reflected that, if there were such a person, he would be in a bad way—that is, if the conjurer's words had meaning. There's no solidarity like that of the junkmen's guilds; some thousands of years of laboring in common have fused them until they're as capable of united action as armies. And the heads of the guilds are practically all members of the Ko Lao Hui. So, if sentence had been passed against the newcomer, it would be fulfilled.

And then I saw him. He was seated just in front of the small cabin 'midship of the last junk to come into view around the curve. A long line of trackers writhed along the dike in front of his craft, dragging it toward me at about two miles an hour, while a *laodah* in the stern and two polesmen in the bow guided it and kept it off the bank.

There was something peculiar about his crew. There was something ugly and menacing—but it had covered half the distance to me before I discovered what it was. It was a very distinctive and suggestive thing: alone of all the trackers on the river, his were not singing that age-old chantey of labor.

Gradually I made out the appearance of the man, for whose boat this distinguishing mark had probably been ordered. Strength and agility, I judged, lay in the slender frame beneath his loose hunting-coat and riding-breeches. But his tanned face, shadowed by a straw helmet, was harder to read. It was good-featured, young, beardless and—enigmatic. I couldn't make out just then in what the enigma consisted.

All the way up to me he gave me but one look, and I thought he was going on.

But, just as I was about to turn away, he snapped out half a dozen words to his crew. The *laodah* threw the heavy helm hard over, and the trackers swung the prow of the boat inshore. The polesmen eased the prow into the muddy bank. Then, at another word of command, they dropped their poles and sprang to the top of the dike, carrying with them the end of a sort of light planking that lay in the bottom of the boat. They dragged this end toward me and dropped it almost at my feet.

It formed a dry bridge to the boat, an invitation. Yet, when I looked at the boat's master, he was glancing carelessly up-stream to Sz-Chuen. Evidently he was forcing himself upon no one; he left me the easy option of withdrawal. It rather pleased me, and I stepped upon the gangway.

AS I entered the prow of the junk, the stranger rose with peculiar ease and swiftness and bowed. Now I corrected my first impression—I saw that his thin-featured face was really in no way remarkable, merely a good-humored, intellectual college man type of countenance. True, it was distinguished by a pair of rather small, very bright, microscopic-looking eyes. The enigma lay in this very lack of the extraordinary. One hardly expects the commonplace in a man traveling alone in the heart of China and beset by such hostility and peril as the conjurer's words had hinted.

"Good morning," he greeted me, crisply courteous.

I clasped his extended hand, receiving a singularly wiry and powerful pressure. Then I heard his *laodah* shout to a junk that had just come up behind that he would be under way again in a minute. Doubtless the *laodah* had his instructions, and I determined to press the interview. Blood calls to blood, and, if he were as inexperienced as he looked, this fellow white man needed help badly.

"I was waiting for you," I told him.

Perhaps I was mistaken, but I thought his right hand moved a little closer to the side pocket of his hunting-coat, the bulge of which suggested a revolver.

"You knew I was coming," a bit tensely.

"I was told. The Chinese knew it, of course. The word's going ahead of you. I wanted to warn you that you're in danger."

"Thanks!" I couldn't understand his

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smile—was it foolhardiness or courage? "But, of course, I knew it. Forewarned, forearmed. I think I've provided against everything."

Now that sounded rather bumptious, but much may be forgiven inexperience, and my desire to help him increased. Also—I don't deny it—my curiosity pressed hard upon my prudence. And, by the way those sharp eyes of his were studying me, I judged he wouldn't really be averse to a better opportunity of getting acquainted.

"My name's Partridge—John Partridge," I told him. "I was really looking for passage north."

"Partridge!" Suddenly his face lit up; clearly he'd hoped for that name. "I thought it might be you. I've heard of you, you see. About a passage north—well, perhaps you'll not want to come with me far. But you'll want your baggage."

I smiled.

"I'm superior to Thoreau's immigrant," I said. "You know, Thoreau regretted not that he had so little but that he required so much. I have about eight pieces of baggage—in my pockets."

Evidently he'd expected that.

"Then—Hazard is my name. They're getting impatient behind. You can come on to the next town, anyway, and further if you like, after you've heard my story."

He turned toward the shore and gave an order. The polesmen slid back the light planking, followed it and seized their poles. As they pushed the boat off, the trackers bent to the rope again, still in that sullen and uncharacteristic silence. Slowly we got under way.

"I've a rather peculiar story to tell you," said Hazard.

He hesitated a moment, and then——

"Exhibits first," he said.

We were still standing, swaying a little with the motion of the boat. The little cabin 'midship was just at our backs. The young man with the clean, scholarly face turned half round and tapped lightly on the frame of that cabin, the doorway of which was filled merely by a curtain of dirty brown canvas. Receiving no response, he drew the curtain lightly back.

On the customary pallet inside the cabin there curled asleep a more than ordinarily good-looking young Chinese woman, well clad in a long light-colored jacket and trousers of brocaded silk. Her feet were encased in embroidered slippers, and she wore her long hair braided down her back, maiden-wise.

"Mu Ting," said Hazard briefly, drawing the curtain close again. "My partner in this enterprise."

I stared at him.

Then he drew me down upon the seat and, with very great care that he wasn't observed by any of the crew, took something from inside his coat. The way he held it made it hard for me to observe it fully at first, and, when I did, I doubted my eyes.

It was a small image, not more than a foot high, made of iron, but, by the way he held it, singularly light. The iron was curiously scarred and pitted. The body of the thing was human-like, and the face was supposed to be human but fell short by several incarnations. Marred as it was by some agency I couldn't yet guess, that face still represented intelligence without spirit, power without conscience, deracialized brutality, a devil's nightmare.

It was a face I'd seen before and a conception that had made history.

"This," explained Hazard, "or my acquisition of it, was the beginning of the whole affair. Which consists," he went on, "in the recovery of the pearls of the deceased Empress Dowager, lost in 1900."

I whistled my incredulity.

"Truly," I remarked, "you are both mad and doomed."

But Hazard merely smiled as he put the image carefully back again in a sort of pouch he'd made in the lower lining of his coat.

"I knew you'd feel that way," he said.

II

SO WE went on up the Pei-Ho, past *li* after *li* of young, green rice, each small rectangular patch of which has supported its village-dwelling family since the gray dawn of history.

Even my interest in Hazard's story didn't prevent me from observing how like active brown ants were the tireless coolies, hoeing, weeding, planting or forcing the water through the irrigation ditches from field to field with their small wooden sluicing wheels.

They themselves seemed touched with the magic wand of perpetuity, working

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there as they had in the beginning. A patient, plodding people, mainly good—and yet how incomprehensible sometimes in their passion!

I wondered how the Western races would stand the test if the dream of the leaders of the Ko Lao Hui were to come true and all these yellow people were united—but Hazard was speaking again of the image inside his coat.

"I can well imagine it," I replied, as he repeated that it was responsible for his presence on the Pei-Ho.

"Yes!" He looked at me sharply, as if he suspected my words had more than a surface meaning. "It's an ugly-looking thing enough, no race, morality or soul—animal individualism, that's all. A sort of fulfillment of the Nietzschean promise.

"Well, I'll tell you the way it was. I bought the image a month ago from a merchant in the village of Kucheng, which you may know is on the Pei-Ho about a day's journey below this point. He held out for a secret sale, though all the village knew he'd fished it out of the river about twenty *li* above Kucheng a week before. It was because of its peculiar ugliness that I bought it, and also because everybody seemed rather scared of it, without knowing why."

"Wait a minute?" I interrupted. "Was it fished from the bottom of the river, or was ——"

"No, it was floating down-stream. It's iron, but it's hollow and considerably lighter than water."

"But I noticed pits in it, like rust pits or erosion——"

"True," cried Hazard rather eagerly. "That's why I know—but let me tell you. Two weeks after I bought the thing, I arrived in Peking. And exactly one day later I was drugged in a tea shop and carried off some way to a thieves' hole in Chi'en Men, where I woke up bound and threatened with torture because I wouldn't tell where I got it. I wouldn't tell, of course, because, if I had, I'd have died the sooner. They couldn't afford to let me escape. Death stared me in the face whether I told or not—only it was so dark where I lay that I couldn't see the shadow of my own eyelids."

"You're skipping a lot," I reminded him.

"I intend to. Unessential details are confusing. How these people discovered I had the image, I don't know—but, then, walls have eyes as well as ears in Peking. They got it; they also got me, and they'd have given me the forty-nine tortures to make me tell where I procured it. That shows how highly they valued the information."

"Well?" The matter-of-fact way he told this wild story rather added to its credibility.

"Well, I was rescued. A little while after the departure of the Chinaman who made me those promises, the door opened again. The atmosphere of the place was pretty stupefying, and I didn't hear it open or close, but I heard some one crossing the room toward me. Then I felt the sharp, cold touch of steel, a cutting edge, on my wrist. Of course, I thought it was death, but the knife slipped under the cords. Though she didn't speak, I realized it was a woman who was saving me. She left immediately, but, after I got the ropes off me, the rest was easy. One mud wall of the place opened on the street—that is, it did after I'd kicked a hole in it."

"But they had the image."

"Yes, though I didn't know they had it till I got back to my compound and found it gone. Then, half an hour later, Mu Ting, whom you've seen—" he nodded backward toward the cabin—"arrived at my compound. She brought the image with her, carefully wrapped up, of course. It was testimony to the fact that it was she who'd cut me loose in that dark room."

"But you said something about the Empress Dowager's pearls," and I smiled a little at the absurdity. "How does it connect up?"

He hesitated a moment.

"I've heard that you speak Pekingese," he stated.

"Fairly well."

"I think I'll let you talk to Mu Ting, then. She's the authority on that affair. You may be able to learn more than I did, for my understanding of Chinese is still pretty clouded. But first, you know there's a chance of such a find?"

The last sentence was half question, half assertion.

"I know, of course, that the Empress Dowager was supposed to have one of the finest collections of pearls in the world and that they are said to have been left behind by her when she exited from Peking to

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escape the consequences of her support of the Boxers. If she did, then there's nothing incredible in the tale that they were carried off by looters. There was plenty of it in 1900—looting, I mean."

"They've never been heard of since. But—Mu Ting!" he raised his voice. "I thought I heard her stir," he added.

WE WERE both silent for a moment then, waiting. I had, of course, plenty of food for reflection. There was one—no, there were two things I knew that Hazard didn't concerning the little metal image and its possible connection with the Forbidden City in the time of the Boxers, and both these facts rather tended to lend his tale the light of possibility.

But, while I mulled things over, I purposely watched the occupants of a junk that was just about to pass us, going downstream. It could be no coincidence that in this, as in the last three craft that I'd observed, all chattering and chanting stopped as it approached us, and every oblique eye, usually so incurious, was turned on us fixedly as if marking us by command.

Truly, whatever the cause, the conjurer's warning hadn't been an idle one.

Then I heard the curtain behind us rustle, and I rose and turned rather eagerly to greet the woman.

She came out of the cabin smiling prettily, rather engagingly. If she was astonished at seeing me there, she didn't show it. She bowed gracefully and looked inquiringly at Hazard. There was a suggestion of complete trustfulness in the way she regarded him.

Ceremony was rather slighted, owing to the circumstances and Hazard's inadequate command of Chinese, but he managed to explain to Mu Ting how I'd come on board and that he proposed—it was the first I'd heard of it—to make me third partner in the expedition. That is, if she acquiesced—which she did, instantly—and if I cared to come in after hearing all the facts. To which end he asked her to tell me why she had released him, why she had come to him afterward, in brief, everything she knew. I suggested that she sit down again on the pallet, while we sat facing her. It was just as well for her to remain invisible to passing junks.

One thing I've admired in Chinese women is their simplicity. Mu Ting's words were like her smile, childlike in their directness. She answered my questions fluently, in a voice that suggested the cooing of a dove. It didn't take long for me to get to the bottom of her belief concerning the matter.

"I was slavegirl of the Ko Lao Hui," she explained. "By and by I was to be wife to some great man in the West. There I would be like—like a monkey on a string. I read in a book that in America even Chinese women are free. So I think I want to go.

"So, when Li Fu Ching bring in the *Megwa* scholar for the torturing irons, and I hear my masters say that where the little iron devil was found there would be found the pearls of the great dead Empress Tz'u-hsi, they——"

Well, that was it, in a nutshell. She had conceived the idea that, if she saved Hazard, he would help her to find the pearls, would share them with her and would help her escape to a land of freedom. Her trust in him she explained on the grounds that most *Megwas* are good men and that this *Megwa* had faced the threat of the Chinese torture most bravely. It was noticeable that she'd dubbed him "scholar," than which her race knows no higher title of respect.

But the Ko Lao Hui was involved—that tremendous *tong!* And Li Fu Ching—I'd heard of him vaguely before as its Peking head. Such things are hard to discover. But more and more clearly I understood why and how the news of Hazard's coming was being relayed ahead of him—understood, too, the ominous silence and sullen looks of his crew and the menacing stares that were cast at us from every passing junk.

"Well, it's considerable story," I said. "Admitting it's all fact, then this is the situation, eh? Somewhere up-river, where that image has lain on the bottom for nineteen years, are pearls worth several fortunes. But wait a minute; the image was found floating. If it's lighter than water——"

"Why did it stay on the bottom?" Hazard anticipated my question. "Well, to begin with, we know it did by the rust pits that cover it. Obviously, then, it was attached to something heavier that held it down. Why not the pearls? The image barely floats. Why, it's plain," he cried eagerly. "It was part of the loot, and it

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and the pearls were tied together in a sack of some sort. With the passing of years the sack rotted, the image floated away, the pearls remained behind."

I THOUGHT it time to tell him what I knew.

"What keeps that from sounding too extravagant," I said, "is the fact that the Boxers of 1900 were really an offshoot of the more ancient Ko Lao Hui and that this troublesome image was sacred with them. It's a combination of the fabled face of Koshinga, the Coming One of the Ko Lao Hui, and the iron body which was the Boxer's symbol of the invulnerability they claimed to possess. I happen to know these facts.

"Well, it's a matter of history that the Empress Dowager half believed in the Boxers and encouraged them until bullets ended their pretensions. So it's quite plain why this image might have remained in her palace when she fled to the hills before the relief expedition. And it's quite plain, too, why looters intending to flee to the sea might take it, figuring that its possession would save them from injury at the hands of the fanatical Boxers."

"Now, that's good," said Hazard. "Mu Ting, do you hear that?"

He tried to tell her, but muddled it up so that I took the matter out of his hands.

"Ko Lao Hui and Boxers are all the same men," corroborated Mu Ting.

"Now," questioned Hazard, eyeing me intently, "in the light of all the facts, just how close can you come to the location of those pearls?"

It was, of course, a problem I'd been considering for several minutes and one of the sort I like to try to untangle.

"The image was found floating about twenty *li* above Kucheng," I repeated his statement. "Which means about thirty *li* below this point."

"Yes. In the early morning."

"Of course. Ten minutes of daylight would have discovered it to some one. For that very reason, it couldn't have floated down-stream more than a night's journey. Then, too, the Chinese drag the stream continually; so it couldn't have been lying in the bed of it. It would have been found long ago. Everything's dragged, in fact, but the bottom of an occasional cave. That's probably the answer."

"Good!" cried Hazard. "Now, as to placing that cave——"

"Why," I replied, "I've noticed you've been watching both banks of the river; so I'll assume it's not below here. And it can't be very far above. The image couldn't have traveled more than fifty *li* in a night. Thirty from fifty——"

"Leaves twenty *li*, or about seven English miles," completed Hazard, "which is the extreme distance up-stream that we should have to look for the cave. It took me somewhat longer to reason all that out."

Of course, I wasn't at all certain that he had reasoned it out. Perhaps he'd only played me for my conclusions. In other words, my first doubt concerning him was still in my mind; only to the possibility that he was a conceited fool was added the suspicion that he might be a liar. But, to do him justice, he looked like neither. And he'd come far!

ALL this talk had taken no more than half an hour, and we were just approaching the next village above Sz-Chuen. Our trackers abandoned the dike for the shallow water and extended the line in order to swing our junk around the collection of *sampans*, which were floating in front of the village all in a cluster, like a flock of half-submerged beetles.

Hazard and I turned to look at the brown dirt walls and the dusty street of the town. The visible life of it consisted of the very young children, the decrepit old, lean-looking hogs, mangy dogs and well-fed fowl. Every one of working age was in the fields.

"Well, you have it all," said Hazard. "If it's loot, it's fair loot. Tracing the ownership of those pearls would be a puzzle worse than even a Chinese ever could invent. But loot and death seem to be usually linked. You've noticed the attitude of the passing junks and even of our own crew."

"Well, it's perfectly plain that Li Fu Ching has traced you down here and is sending out the word against you," I told him. "The reason that there's no order to attack you is that he wants to let you find the pearls first. Even then, of course, for his own sake, he'll hold off the attack till he can be present in person. But you'll be watched every minute. You see, he really has two strings to his bow. One is the ancient law of the junkmen's guilds, by which

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they claim everything that's taken from the river and forbid any outsider from working on it or in it. The other is his position as member of the Inner Circle of the Ko Lao Hui, which makes all the headmen of the guild subordinate to him."

"So you think Old Man Death waits up there for us with a club," suggested Hazard quizzically.

"Why, there's no escape," said I.

"There's always escape," declared Hazard, but in a rather detached way, as if he was stating a formula.

"Consider the situation," I argued. "We need look for no help outside ourselves. We're as alone as if there were no other white men on the continent. And you know the implacable temper of the Chinese mob, once it's aroused. You know how small the mere accidents of existence, living or dying, killing or being killed, are to the Asiatic mind. No, we need expect no mercy."

"Nevertheless," said Hazard quietly, "I'll repeat my statement: I've taken account of all chances; I've provided against everything. That is, everything except that unescapable Fate which we call accident. I'm sorry you're leaving me here."

We had come opposite the town, and he waited my word to make a landing.

I smiled at him rather constrainedly and shook my head. Frankly, at that moment, my feeling toward him was decidedly frigid. His cocksureness irritated me, and I couldn't cast off the impression that I'd been trapped. For, of course, it was quite impossible for me to abandon the adventure now. There remained too many problems unsolved—not the least of which was the perplexing riddle of the elusive personality hidden behind Hazard's unremarkable face.

"I suppose you could also explain how the pearls and the image found their way into the cave in the first place and why they were abandoned there?" I remarked, with a touch of sarcasm. "And no doubt you've planned out fully how you're to recover them from under this muddy water? Have you brought a diving-suit along?"

"Hardly," he said, with a smile. I took it for an answer to the last question only.

So, in a silence that was the slightest bit awkward, we swung past the town and on up the river. Now the country through which we passed grew less populous. Here and there black rocks jutted above the level of the farming land, which was itself of a rocky subsoil and hard to till.

The brown-skinned humans, ant-like in their industry, still worked the fields, but they were less numerous here. The banks of the river gradually rose till they were far over our heads, and finally it was only at intervals that we could catch sight of the surrounding country at all.

Still the string of trackers, enduring as machines, writhed on ahead of us pulling the boat, now wading through the shallow water at the edge of the stream, now winding along narrow paths cut in the side of the bank.

Still, while from up-stream and down-stream came the chanting of other trackers, a weird, age-old song of labor, a sort of unifying chorus, half dirge and half pæan—of men who had been born on the river, and who lived of the river and would die on the river—these men of ours worked in a silence that set them apart, that advertised the unwillingness with which they served us.

And still from every passing junk came that answering silence, that slant-eyed, curious stare, unfriendly inquisitive, portentous of trouble.

It's hardly to be wondered at that, by the time we came upon that for which we were looking, a depressing sense of unreality had begun to afflict me. Belief in the stories of Hazard and Mu Ting had been easy while I listened to them, but now they seemed far-fetched and extravagant as a dream.

Equally so seemed the reasoning by which Hazard and I had builded upon those stories, locating to our imaginations the long-lost jewels of the long-dead empress. And in this trip itself there seemed a touch of the grotesque—two white men who were strangers to each other and a woman of an alien race, encompassed by danger, drawn by unfriendly hands into the maw of the unknown.

"Here it is," said Hazard.

With something of astonishment, I looked upon the fulfillment of our imaginings. The opening in the bank was on our side of the river; it was about fifteen feet wide at water level, and in the center was a little more than man-high. Hazard stopped the junk when we were directly in front of that opening. Looking back through it, into the depths of the cave, we could see nothing but blackness, shot through by ripples of light reflected from the surface of the water.

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"Now," I said half-scoffingly, "to get to the bottom of that water——"

Hazard picked a bamboo splinter from the bottom of the junk. He tossed it into the water and watched it drift into the cave with unanxious and unsurprized eyes.

"We'll simply build a dike or dam across the mouth of the cave," he completed my sentence for me, "and wait. It's as I expected—the cave will drain itself."

III

BRIBED by the promise of more silver than they had ever before possessed, half an hour later the crew of our junk had procured shovels from neighboring farms and were engaged in pitching earth from the bank above into the stream. Their faces were yellow masks, but there was sullenness in their every movement. Plainly they worked against their wills, and plainly they resented our power to force their wills by purchase.

Whether they divined the meaning of their work, that the completed dam would shut out the river and thus permit the water in the cave to pass out through the subterranean drain indicated by the ingoing current, we could not tell.

But they were a small part of the danger that would presently confront us. Shortly after they had begun the work, during the progress of which Hazard, Mu Ting and I stayed on the junk, we were startled by a rattling like a succession of pistol shots. Looking out into the stream, we saw that a passing junk had dropped its bamboo-cleated sails, loosed its anchor and swung idly by in the current.

Then the one that had followed us close all morning, taking its trackers on board, pushed out into the middle of the river and joined its fellow. Thereafter not one junk passed that point; from up-river and down-river they gathered like a collection of evil birds. Then they waited. They did nothing but wait. There was something cynical in that silent waiting, something implacable and monstrous.

"We'll have witnesses to our triumph—or our obsequies," I observed, after about a dozen river boats had thus arrived and stopped.

"Obviously," he replied rather cheerfully.

He was engaged at that moment in carefully trimming with his pocket-knife the ragged ends of a piece of bamboo, about four feet long, which he'd picked up somewhere.

"Li Fu Ching's behind this," I reminded him unnecessarily. "We'll pay for the work and find the pearls; the coolies will do the killing, and he'll collect."

"Pshaw!" said Hazard lightly. "He'll have a hard time collecting from drowned men."

I'm afraid I flashed at him a rather impatient glance. The humor of the remark didn't impress me, and, if his tone indicated a hidden significance, I failed to grasp it. There was truth in it to this extent, at least, that we had as good a chance of drowning as any other form of death.

"Cheer up," grinned Hazard, catching my look. "We live but once and die but once: that's elemental."

"The more reason," I replied dryly, "for postponing that latter inevitable event."

"You have me there," he admitted. "I take it your confidence in me is being rather strained. I might as well say now that I took a week to think this thing out, and every detail is accounted for. Would it add to your expectancy of life if I were to tell you exactly what we'll find at the bottom of that cave, besides the pearls?"

"It would be interesting," I admitted skeptically.

"Well, we'll find bones there," he said. "The skeletons of men. Both white men and Chinese, likely. And at least the metal parts of rifles—the wood may be rotted away—both foreign and native. Ammunition, too, of course. And rocks scattered about, as if carried into the cave by a rush of water."

I made no reply. His assured forecast of something that would so soon be proved or disproved impressed me, but I was mainly interested in wondering just how we could avoid leaving our own bones there. And his assumption of superior knowledge rather irritated me, although I knew that irritation was uncalled for. He himself admitted that his insight was merely the result of long thought. I should be the last man to deny the efficacy of that.

SO PERHAPS two hours passed, very nearly in silence. Occasionally Mu Ting hummed a song under her breath, not unmelodiously, very self-possessed and brave. And our Chinese worked

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steadily. Their race knows but one way of doing a thing, whether for friend or foe—that's the thorough way. They were building us a good dike. Thousands of shovelsful of earth descended over the bank into the slow-moving current. The muddy water grew even muddier from the little particles that floated off. But most of it settled to the bottom, and very slowly that bottom, thus continually added to, rose up to divide the waters of the river from the waters of the cave.

But not so slowly did the junks gather, coming in silently, sullenly, as with a fixed and measured purpose. The line of them, jammed close, prow inshore, in the middle of the stream, extended steadily in either direction. Presently the ends of that line began to curve toward the shore. It was their evident intention to hem us in.

"The individualities of those men," Hazard mused, seemingly to himself, "aren't developed. The race itself is an individual. The mass can be trained into the unit—to obey like the unit. There's the great danger——"

Truly, the gathering of the junkmen illustrated that principle, but I couldn't believe it was our danger of which Hazard was thinking.

"It'll be night by the time the dike is finished," said I, with a look at the westering sun.

"Yes," said Hazard.

We ate—crammed ourselves at Hazard's suggestion—from a supply of hard-boiled eggs, corn bread and plantains Hazard had cached in the cabin. The laboring coolies didn't stop to eat. They were in a hurry to get through with their work and with us.

It was about sunset when they patted smooth with their bare feet the top of the dike, which rose about a foot above the surface of the water. At that sign of completion, Hazard rose, went to the prow of the boat and from under the forward thwart drew a large roll of blankets. He brought them back 'midship and began to make another bundle of Mu Ting's bedding, which was inside the cabin.

"Sometimes it pays to travel like an immigrant," smiled Hazard. "The dike's our home from now on."

The crew of the junk, their work completed, were gathered in a knot on the nearly leveled bank. They were discussing something. When the knot broke and they started singly over the plank bridge to the junk—veritable mud-larks, almost entirely naked, like creatures of another world—I knew Hazard was right.

Dull animosity sat with a scowl upon each man's face. They had determined to be done with us after the payment. As for us, of course, it wouldn't have been safe to have spent the night on the junk with them.

"We might buy those planks," I suggested to Hazard. "They'd keep us out of the mud."

"We'll try it."

But the *laodah*, master of the junk, developed absolute incapacity to understand me when I made the offer. And, when Mu Ting herself addressed him, at my request, he refused in sudden hot anger and motioned us off the junk.

Standing on the dike, we watched our late servants paddle swiftly away to join the ever-lengthening line of our enemies. Then Hazard and I laid down our blankets, and, while the purple and gold died out of the haze that covered the land and in the west the sun sank with a last flare of crimson, we carried some rocks from where the dike joined the bank so we could at least sit dry through the night.

We spent the night there, Mu Ting, Hazard and I. Hazard and I arranged a sentry go, for it was possible we would be attacked before morning. It depended, we agreed, upon when Li Fu Ching arrived. Until then the junkmen evidently only had orders to watch us while we traveled, close in upon us when we stopped and prepare to destroy us at command. Naturally, Li Fu Ching himself must be present at the dénouement, else where would be his chance of attaching the pearls?

I think for Mu Ting the night passed most easily. Most of her race could sleep quite soundly standing on their heads in sugar barrels, which is a quality worth considering. But Hazard also demonstrated that he had learned the trick of sleeping under difficulties. I did quite well toward morning, but most of the night I spent watching the lights of the junks, like evilly vigilant eyes, extend to right and left, in peering into the black depths of the cave, where water no longer glimmered in the moonlight, and wondering what riddle the morning would read.

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Hazard would have me think he had already read that riddle. I doubted it. I doubted his every pretension. Particularly I doubted his pretended knowledge of a way out of this predicament. I hoped that he and I, and brave little Mu Ting, too, would live to understand the mystery of the cave, but I felt that for the three of us this understanding would only be preliminary to exploring, before another sunset, the greater mystery of Death.

IV

BUT morning is a miracle, in the way it brings us strength. Perhaps the sun has seldom risen on a trio more depressingly situated, but, as the east paled and the light came, something like cheerfulness came over us.

At least we were still alive. The center of the line of junks was no nearer to us, although up-stream and down-stream it curved in until its ends impinged against the shore. And every minute we could see further into the mysterious depths of the cave.

We could see further into it, for the rays of the rising sun, increasing in strength, shone directly through the opening. From the front of the cave, at least, the water had entirely receded. As far as we could see, the nearly dry bottom sloped downward steeply, its own rock surface covered with other rocks of all sizes, some of them shattered into fragments, as if they'd been flung forcibly into that cave and dashed against its floor.

"Now," said Hazard, who had viewed all this with a peculiar air of satisfaction, "let's get busy. Mu Ting, are you ready?"

The Chinese girl, who had been placidly rearranging the end of her long, black braid, rose smiling the eternal smile of the East.

"Whatever the honorable *Megwa* scholar wishes," she murmured in her musical voice.

"It's best to hurry," I agreed. "Li Fu Ching can't be long coming, if he's not already here."

Hazard nodded agreement and began helping Mu Ting down the steep, muddy side of the dike. We all moved with some difficulty, being still chilled and stiff from the night's exposure. But my own physical hardships, at least, were easily enough disregarded. Also, once I'd turned away from them, I found it not hard to force to the background of my mind thought of the vulture-like junks outside.

Ahead of us was treasure, perhaps, but certainly knowledge. Perhaps we'd find there all that we hoped, justification of our reasoning, fulfillment of our dream—but more probably, I now thought, we'd learn that we had conceived a wild chimera and that our carefully worked out plan but led into a blind alley of destruction.

If I'd permitted myself to think of it, I should have known that, once we had disappeared into the cave, the junkmen would unquestionably close in upon the mouth of it and take our place upon the dike.

This they'd do in literal obedience to their orders not to lose touch with us. My imagination balked at conceiving how we would escape then. It was because of that I forbore thinking of them. I'd elected to follow Hazard, and I would follow him, but there are limits to every one's courage, and I'd come to sparing mine.

We got in some fashion or other to the bottom of the dike and began clambering over the rocks, down the inclined bottom of the cave. Hazard and I kept pretty much side by side in front, while Mu Ting followed us closely. The almost level rays of the sun penetrated a long way ahead of us, but as yet we could see no end to the cave. Presently Hazard stopped and stirred something with his foot.

"Look here!" There was a slight note of satisfaction in his voice.

It was a human skull, square-jawed, level of eye-socket, arched of forehead, unmistakably the skull of a white man.

"What of it?" I asked.

He looked at me sideways, with a half-smile.

"You've forgotten," he accused me quizzically. "What did I prophesy? But come on."

I FOLLOWED him, and presently we came across that which forced to my mind Hazard's apparently impossible forecast uttered the day before. Bones, guns and shattered rocks he'd said we would find. We were now thirty feet from the entrance to the cave, and the place was like a charnel-house. And among the bleached skeletons of white men and Asiatics, mingled confusedly as if they'd been overtaken by some unimaginable catastrophe, were ruined European

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rifles of an ancient pattern—Mannlichers, they were—and muzzle-loading Chinese *jingals* and matchlocks.

"How did you know it?" I cried in sheer bewilderment.

"Loot and death!" said Hazard meditatively. "Loot and death! See—" he picked up a metal button and a cap ornament—"they were Austrian soldiers."

"But what happened?" I cried.

"Can't you imagine it?"

I think I could have imagined it then. Confronted by that visible result, I think I could have recreated the cause: indeed, my groping mind had seized the first thread of the truth when Mu Ting, who had viewed the ghastly débris with Asiatic unconcern, recalled us to the more important object of our search.

"The pearls?" she inquired insistently. "The pearls?"

"Right enough," said Hazard and began searching quite coolly among the gruesome relics, turning over the rocks, throwing aside the white bones, scraping out of the way the silt deposited by the river. I followed his example, but my attention was irresistibly attracted by sounds of movement and of low guttural voices behind me. I looked back, in spite of myself, knowing what I would see.

On the top of the dike, clearly framed in the opening of the cave, was the sign of our doom. It was a solid bank of sun-tanned faces, muscular trunks and yellow limbs, clothed imperfectly—for the morning was still cool—in ragged garments of China-blue.

"The junkmen have landed on the dike," I said in a whisper.

"Obviously they would do that," replied Hazard with irritating unconcern. "Ah, I've found them."

Instantly Mu Ting and I were at his side. His right hand was filled with globules of varying shape. At his feet, in a cup-like depression in the rock floor, where they'd lain so many years, were many others—hundreds of them. I clutched a handful. In the semi-darkness their coloring was like any other pebbles, but by their weight and size and rounded, smooth surfaces we knew them. They were pearls, pearls, the treasure for which we had hoped.

Fair loot, if ever loot was fair—honorable spoil for the first finder! They'd been gathered through foul methods by a corrupt court that had fallen long ago; they'd been stolen from a long dead empress who had no manner of right to them; they'd been lost, buried and forgotten for nearly twenty years. They were ours, the ransom of a kingdom!

Now wealth is something I've never pretended to despise; nor have I claimed to be superior to that lust for it which has through all the ages stirred men's blood and driven them to deeds incredible. I admit that for a moment I forgot the double bank of coolies at the entrance of the cave, forgot the walls of rock that prisoned us around, forgot the dead bones at our feet—mute and terrible prophecies of our own fate—and thrilled only to the thought of our priceless find.

"Fill your pockets," half-whispered Hazard.

"They'll see us." But I stooped quickly to obey.

"We can't help it. They can't see us plainly, anyway. They'll not understand what we're doing. Hurry."

We picked them up as fast as we could, Mu Ting helping, putting the pearls away in her jacket somewhere. It was then that I got the first intimation that something was wrong. The light was very poor, but—I remembered some other pearls I had seen, the shimmering whiteness of them, the ghostly tints of pink and amber glowing up from their hearts. Surely these were not. . . .

"Ah! Listen!"

My half-formulated thought was interrupted, was swept from my mind by what I heard coincident with Hazard's exclamation. There had been a disturbance among the coolies on the dike, as if some one had pushed through them roughly. Now a loud and imperative voice began haranguing them. At the first sound of that harsh voice Mu Ting shivered and whimpered aloud:

"It is my master. Now we die."

"The circle's completed," said Hazard coolly. "It's Li Fu Ching."

Of course, the wonder was that he hadn't come before. The word that he'd sent up and down the river to locate us and hold us had traveled fast enough. Perhaps the return message notifiying him of the corner in which we'd obligingly placed ourselves had been delayed, or perhaps—but that's conjecture.

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Chinese are proverbially dilatory, anyway. As it was, he had no reason to believe we'd already found the pearls. Swiftly I tried to decide what would be in his mind. It would be this: he would get us killed; he would send the coolies on their way; then at his leisure he would return and pick up the pearls. That would be the purpose of his harangue, the words of which came jumbled to our ears.

"The devil!" muttered Hazard. "Shall I shoot him? No; it's hardly worth the chance. They might rush us."

BUT, if I knew my Chinaman, nothing but shooting Li Fu Ching or silencing him in some way would prevent them from rushing us. Invariably the sluggish nerves of the Chinese coolie class require strong stimulus to rouse them to action; sometimes a mob stimulates itself by loud chanting and yells and jabbering, but always it will give itself up to the impassioned spellbinder.

And Li Fu Ching was eloquent, as most Chinese are under stress, melting gutturals, labials, sibilants and aspirants into an endless monotone more compelling than the fieriest accented speech. I caught a few words of his deadly urging. He was appealing to the spirit of the guilds: we had trespassed upon their property, the river; we would rob them of things that were theirs.

Now Hazard did an irritating thing. In apparent indifference to the death that fronted us, he tried to reason out how Li Fu Ching had known that the pearls were here.

"I've never been able to solve that," he said. "Or rather I've found so many solutions. One is that he was a Boxer chief; that he saw the looters making way with the pearls and the image; that he detailed a trusty subordinate and the men whose bones lie here in pursuit, and that none returned. But that's far-fetched. There are other simpler explanations. For instance——"

I tried to keep my temper, but I lost it then.

"For —— sake—" I began and then stopped in discouragement at the utter futility of appeal.

True, he had claimed to have almost a chance-proof plan of saving us. But already the coolies were crying to each other excitedly; those in front were crouching as wild animals do before the spring, with strength showing in every line of them. They had knives in their hands, a few pistols; we'd be overwhelmed in the mass of them. It would be no use to beg, no use to resist.

"Before they take me, I must die," said Mu Ting.

What an ancient and universal plea that is! Yes, it was the cry of a Chinese woman. Once have the wells of Shensi, and once of Peking, been choked with the dead bodies of women who have thrown themselves there to escape the rabble—and that within two decades.

I turned upon Hazard furiously.

"You boasted—" I began again.

He didn't seem to hear me.

"Well, it's about time," he murmured thoughtfully and as calmly as if he held all the future in his own hands.

And he stooped and seemed to be doing something with a light, stout cord that lay near his feet.

I stared at him; I hadn't perceived that cord before, but I saw now that it stretched outward toward the mouth of the cave, and I realized that he had dropped it behind him, a connecting link to the dike, as we had entered.

There is nothing as terrifying as the inexplicable and, under certain circumstances, nothing as reassuring. When understanding is lacking, anything is possible. And, if I hadn't at bottom been possessed of some little instinctive confidence in Hazard, I'd hardly have yielded my fate to him so readily. Anyway, at that action of his my spirits swung away from hopelessness.

"What are you——"

But I was interrupted amazingly, and a moment later changed my question—

"What have you done?"

For he had pulled the cord sharply, and that instant there had boomed through the cave the sound of a muffled explosion.

"Merely completed the obvious," replied Hazard calmly.

The madman had blown up the dike. Or rather he had blown up one end of it. Away from that end the Chinese leaped, some into the water, some toward the center of the dike, forcing their comrades back in a solid mass. This was all to the accompaniment of shrill cries of astonishment and terror, which drowned out Li Fu Ching's

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voice. An instant later the water burst through the dike, with a rushing, gurgling sound, and reached toward us like a lapping tongue.

"You've drowned us," I accused Hazard.

"Certainly," and there was exasperating amusement in his voice. "You might have surmised what I intended to do. Didn't I say Li Fu Ching would find it hard to collect from us if we were drowned?"

"Faugh! You've played into his hands. You've simplified things for him. Now the junkmen will never know there were pearls here. Li Fu Ching will send them away, then come back secretly himself with some of his own Peking ruffians. He'll drain the cave at his leisure and take the pearls from our dead bodies."

"That's the way I figured it, too," and Hazard chuckled maddeningly.

"Well, you—" I began. Then I realized the folly of expostulation. After all, we couldn't have escaped anyway. "When did you plant that—mine?" I asked.

"Last night, while you slept. But compose yourself; we're not dead yet. While we're waiting for whatever's to come, let's try reading a riddle. The riddle of this cave, I mean—of the bones and the pearls and the image and how they all came here. Can you make it out now?"

As I remember it, it was rather a relief to find an excuse for turning away from the face of death. And there was to be an interim. The Chinese were laughing now—low, sly, cruel-sounding laughter. They realized the deadly joke we'd played upon ourselves and knew we'd be killed without further act of theirs. So, with my mind working rather jerkily, I considered the problem Hazard suggested, which all of a sudden I discovered to be no problem at all, in the light of our own predicament.

"Why, it's simple now," I cried. "The event is merely repeating itself. The cave was dry-bottomed in those days, as it is now; all we've done is to reconstruct a natural dam. They were all drowned as we're to be drowned."

"Just how do you figure it?" queried Hazard curiously.

"I suppose," I said slowly, "that the Austrian looters fled into this cave, closely pursued by the Boxers. It was customary for the Chinese to carry large quantities of powder for their muzzle-loading rifles. A fight, a chance shot exploding a keg or more of this powder, which would naturally remain on the junk close in upon the dike—yes, that's what happened. It must have been a great explosion, destroying the dike completely. See how these rocks are shattered to pieces."

"I think that's the only possible explanation," corroborated Hazard. "Every one that wasn't killed by the rocks was drowned. The water must have come in a solid wall, not slowly, as it's coming now. I figured on only starting it."

"Where did you get the explosive?"

"It was a mine I brought with me from Peking."

"From Peking!" I stared at him, both curiosity and resentment freshly aroused. "Then you planned this. In Heaven's name, why?"

"Well," said Hazard, calmly, "I guess it's about time to tell you that. Now, if we stay here quietly and drown, what happens?"

"Why," I said, "we went over that. Li Fu Ching will send the coolies away, then——"

"Yes, but supposing we stay here quietly on the bottom of the cave and are not drowned?"

JUST then the front of the inrushing waters broke about our ankles. Up toward the mouth of the cave it was coming like a cataract, the dam breaking down more and more. The Chinese were abandoning it now and taking to their junks, which were jammed solidly into the bank.

"That's your answer," I replied, a little sullenly. "It's either drown or surrender ourselves and Mu Ting to the Chinese, and I'm afraid I prefer drowning."

"Do you think so?" asked Hazard. "Well, come this way."

Suddenly he had swung around, taken Mu Ting's elbow and my own in either hand and was leading us back into the cave. A few steps, and the innermost wall loomed darkly before us. We reached that nearly vertical wall, and Hazard put out his hand and touched, one after the other, three small objects the sight of which thrilled me to the marrow.

Not altogether pleasant, that thrill, that emotional reaction, as I passed from hopelessness to near certainty of continued life. My heart missed a beat; my skin grew

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suddenly moist, and I trembled with the suddenness of the transition. For there, affixed to the rock, was very nearly perfect assurance of safety both from the rising waters and our twist-brained enemies.

"These," said Hazard, "I brought from Peking, too. I fastened them here last night, when I set the mine. Now do you understand my question?"

I did. I understood it well.

"My ——, Hazard!" I cried, in something like awe. "You brought them. But why three?"

"I told you," he said, "that I hoped to pick you up."

This was what he had done. He had brought with him from Peking and clamped on the irregular knobby face of the wall three breathing-tubes of hard rubber. Vertically these tubes extended about a foot higher than the water would reach when the cave was flooded. At the bottom were mouthpieces, which were curved horizontally away from the wall. These would have been a little too high for convenient use, only Hazard had built up the bottom of the cave with loose rocks.

"Very good," approved Mu Ting, in a voice that, fear having departed, was quite emotionless.

"Hollow bamboo might have done as well," said Hazard, "if I hadn't foreseen the contingency and brought these. As it was, I planned to splice these with bamboo at the upper end, if they weren't long enough without it. I had to carry them secretly inside my coat, and three and a half feet was the limit. But the mouthpieces of these are especially shaped, as you see. We'll have no difficulty in excluding the water. Well," there was laughter in his voice, "do you understand now?"

"Ah, Hazard, Hazard," I cried, in a sort of ecstasy of admiration, "it's always easy enough to understand after the event. But to foresee——"

Very faintly now the jeering laughter and chattering of the junkmen came to us. The rush and roar of the water was much louder. By now it had reached to our knees.

THE rest of our escape was commonplace. Within ten minutes we were completely submerged, and for half an hour we remained so, breathing through the hollow rubber tubes. It wasn't particularly difficult or unpleasant. The only danger was that the two junks which came in searching for us—they were betrayed by the vibrations of the water—would find the projecting ends of the breathing-tubes. But the fact that these tubes lay against the wall reduced that danger to a minimum.

I suppose the searchers finally concluded that we'd weighted our clothes with rocks and drowned quietly, rather than risk falling into their hands alive.

Anyway, when we chanced coming out, we found the coast clear. That was pretty sure to be true, the Chinese being the industrious creature he is and not lightly neglecting business. A little back of the river bank we found a place where we could dry ourselves in the sun without much danger of discovery, and then began an uneventful journey overland. Three days took us to the Han-Ho, and four days longer to Tientsin, where we sold the nearly ruined pearls for a thousand *taels*.

This money we gave to Mu Ting and parted from her at the gate of a missionary school—but to come back to the pearls.

It was while we lay drying in the sun that the instant's misgiving I'd already had concerning those pearls was justified. In the light of day they were no less dull and dead than they'd been in the gloom of the cave. Only the hearts of some of the larger ones remained "alive," which accounts for the fact that we were able to sell them to a Chinese jeweler for "peeling." As to their ruin, the explanation was easy.

"Nineteen years in water saturated with animal acids as was the water of that cave—no wonder!" said Hazard. "There may have been unwholesome exudations from the soil besides. A great many ideas about pearls are superstitions, but there's no question about their peculiar delicacy and susceptibility. I foresaw this as a possibility."

"You foresaw everything," I said.

"Pshaw!" he put aside my admiration. "I did no more than you could have done, given time. You recognized the fact that the long-submerged image, found floating down the river, could only have come from a cavern of some sort. Given that fact, at which I arrived in Peking, the rest was easy."

"Even to providing breathing-tubes by which we could sham drowning?" I cried

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incredulously. I was still marveling at that supreme example of foresight.

"Even that," he smiled. "I think I can state my reasoning in five sentences. The looters would only have entered the cave for refuge, and they would only have abandoned their loot because of fatality.

That fatality must be complete and must include also the members of the pursuing party, else they would have carried away the pearls. There never was a mere battle in which all combatants were killed; therefore we must look to some more deadly natural catastrophe. In a cavern opening off a river there are two possibilities—a cave-in of earth or an inundation.

In the former case the image and pearls would have been buried along with the rest; so that leaves the one possibility of an inundation, which leads irresistibly to the theory of a natural dike, a gun-fight inside the cave, an explosion which destroys the dike, with the consequent deluge."

It seemed a clear and concise statement of a somewhat remarkable process of imaginative reasoning.

"From that theory," went on Hazard, "to providing for our own escape in case we were besieged in the cave after we'd drained it out—which I had every reason to believe would happen—was a mere matter of common sense."

"Perhaps, if you put a certain prefix before that word 'common.' But with escape so nearly certain, and a rich find so probable, I don't understand why you invited me into the affair."

"Well," said Hazard, "as I said before, I've heard of you. One gets to hear things in this country, even secret things. There's a certain investigation you're making which —well, which this devil-faced little god—" he touched the bulge of his coat beneath which the image lay—"seemed to suggest. And so—well, I wanted to meet you, anyway."

I caught the tentatively suggested offer which lay behind his words.

"It's a big thing," I warned. "A dangerous thing."

"I thought you might let me help you," said Hazard modestly.

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LYNCH LAWYERS

A FIVE-PART STORY
PART II

By WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

Author of "Hidden Trails," "High Pockets," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

WITH a clatter of hurrying hoofs the posse rode out of town. With it rode Red Kane.

That fifty thousand in gold had been stolen from the express office at Farewell did not worry Red a great deal—ten thousand had been for Bill Lanpher, boss of the 88, and Red's outfit did not love the 88—but Red's little black horse had gone with the money. Red wanted that horse.

Five miles out of Farewell the posse came upon the express box and safe, both open and empty, and two teams of stolen mules. Red and his brother Tom rode on.

"What are you doin'?" A dark-eyed girl looked out of the deserted K C ranch-house.

Red Kane told her.

"I see. You thought maybe my father or I had your horse. People think nesters will do 'most anything. Yes, they do. We came by the 88, and the manager was pretty disagreeable. What's his name? Lanpher? Well, you two go back to Lanpher and tell him Dot Lorimer said next time to come himself. Slide, the two of you!"

She trained a Winchester on Red's stomach. Not until he and Tom had gone swiftly away from there did Red remember he was using a borrowed saddle marked with the 88 brand. Then he grinned.

"Some girl!" he said. "Some girl!"

Riding out of town next day, Red and Kansas Casey, deputy sheriff, came upon a man pinned under a fallen cottonwood.

"I live at the old K C ranch," he whispered. "My name is Lorimer."

At the K C ranch Dot Lorimer bandaged her father's bruised side. Then she turned to Red.

"You're awfully persistent about coming out here," she said. "What are your intentions?"

"I'm gonna marry you!"

Came a clatter of hoofs. Sixteen dusty men rode up to the ranch-house. Red noted four with distaste—Durkin, Lenn, Dill, Cox.

"We want this here Lorimer feller," said Carlson, the leader. "The stage was held up, and we think this gent knows something about it. And about the express robbery, too."

"Well," said Kansas Casey, "I guess we'll have to search the house."

Into the house they went. *Bang!* Out they came. Cox nursed a punctured hand. Lorimer's injury hadn't affected his trigger finger.

"We didn't find nothin," said Durkin, "but I'll bet he held up that stage, just the same."

Bang again. In Durkin's hair appeared a neat crease. Dot Lorimer held a smoking gun.

"Anybody else think my father is a road-agent?" she asked pleasantly.

No one did. The lynching party went away.

Back in Farewell, old Mr. Saltoun, Red's boss, leaned against the jamb of the express office and felt something pricking his shoulder. It was a broken knife blade. Red Kane found the knife. It bore the initials B. L. What was Lorimer's first name?

Bill Lanpher, come to howl about his ten thousand, went away with two quart bottles and the conviction that the nesters at the K C ranch had his gold. And Red Kane appointed himself unofficial sleuth and set out to solve the mystery.

CHAPTER X

HEY, BOYS, UP GO WE!

IN THE glory of the sunset the 88 cook stood and scratched his shoulder-blades against the grateful corner of the cook-shack. As a back-scratcher the corner of a house is only excelled by a post with the bark on. The cook rolled ecstatic eyes heavenward. Tom Dowling, straddling one end of the wash-bench, watched the cook with solemn eyes.

"When I look at you doin' that," remarked Tom Dowling, "I get homesick. I had a hawg once—the cutest li'l' feller he was, with a curly tail an' everythin'—an' he'd scratch himself just like that, only, o' course, he never rared up on his hind legs.

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He always stood on all fours. Cookie, lessee you stand on all fours. Naw I won't go to —— neither. Bill, whadda you think o' Cookie talkin' like that? 'Tain't right, is it?"

"No," replied Bill Allen, the freckle-faced puncher occupying the other end of the wash-bench, "no, Cookie oughtn't to talk thataway. It's shockin'. Le's teach Cookie manners. You injun up on him in front an' I'll injun round behind him; then, while he's a-kickin' at you, I'll grab him."

The cook retreated rapidly to the cook-shack door, reached within and possessed himself of a stick of stove-wood.

"You lemme be," he advised them earnestly; "you lemme be, or I'll shore whang you with this here. I don't mind foolin', but the last time you done wrastled with me my watch got stepped on, an' it ain't acted right since. Besides— Aw look, they's Lanpher a-comin' an' I gotta sling his grub together."

The cook pettishly slammed the stove-wood stick into a far corner and began to fill the coffee-pot.

"Lanpher's shore feelin' rumdumptious," observed Tom Dowling, squinting at the approaching horseman.

"Sore as a bear about somethin'," said Bill Allen. "Bet he'll have us a-cuttin' wood or hay tomorrow. He always does that when his ol' liver ain't right."

They watched the gloomy Lanpher strip his mount, turn the horse loose and go into the ranch dragging saddle and saddle-bags.

"Got a bottle, maybe two, in them bags," was the sage pronouncement of Tom Dowling. "Look how careful he packed 'em in."

"Shore," assented Bill Allen. "But if we brought a bottle back with us, that'd be somethin' else again. I guess so. We'd get our time, y' betcha."

"He carries it good, I'll say that for him," said Tom Dowling. "Outside o' bein' crankier'n usual, yuh'd never know it next day."

"Alla same, the old red-eye's beginnin' to ride him. His nose is startin' to show a li'l' red round the edges an' his appetite ain't what it was. He drinks more coffee, too. I know. I've watched him."

"Here he comes now." Tom Dowling gave his friend a warning nudge.

Lanpher nodded surlily to the two punchers as he crossed from the ranch-house to the dining-room built against the north end of the cook-shack. At the door Lanpher paused and half turned.

"Tom," said he, "you'n Bill better cut wood tomorrow. Take 'Slim' an' Rockwell along to help. Tell the rest of the boys the grass on the flat is high enough to cut an' they might's well get at it."

Lanpher took his morose self on into the dining-room and called for coffee and bread and butter. He didn't feel like eating any meat. It was too hot. —— of a country to live in. Man might as well sit in an oven and be done with it. He'd rather, if anybody should ask him.

"Told yuh we'd have to cut wood or hay," grunted Bill Allen. "Knowed it, —— the luck. Listen to him tellin' Cookie how good the coffee is—not. If I was Cookie I'd tell him where to go just too quick. Cookie's too good-natured with him. Where yuh goin', Tom?"

"I'm gonna get the cross-cut an' hide it where Slim an' Rockwell can't lay their paws on it first," was the answer. "Me, I don't care nothin' about usin' a ax."

In the dining-room, a lighted lamp before him, Lanpher sat long over his coffee and bread. He ate no more than two slices of the bread, but he drank seven cups of black coffee. At the meal's end he rolled and lit a cigaret and went back through the soft darkness to the ranch-house.

This night he did not follow custom by going to bed with his bottle. Instead, he seated himself in the chair behind the table he used as a desk, stuck up his feet on the table top and held the bottle in his lap.

He had not lit the lamp. For there were no window-shades, and it would never do for the outfit to see him drinking. He utterly failed to realize that what they did not actually know they guessed at quite shrewdly.

Thus he sat solitary in the dark, smoking and drinking. A long slow draw at a cigaret and a slower exhale would be followed by a healthy pull at the bottle neck. Puff and swallow, puff and swallow, while the hours slid away to the ticking of the alarm-clock on the shelf above Lanpher's head.

Now a man with an educated stomach may drink a quart of whisky and become no more than lightly jingled—provided he takes his time in the business.

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Lanpher took his first swallow of corn whisky a few minutes after ten o'clock. He gulped down the last drop in the bottle at half-past one in the morning. Remained the other bottle, that containing the rye.

Lanpher had meant the second bottle for another evening, but his hand touched its smooth side as he put away the empty. His fingers hesitatingly closed round its neck. Why not crowd two evenings into one and make a regular night of it for once? Why not have one more drink at least? A short swallow, a mere tongue-wetting?

Lanpher gripped the full bottle firmly and carried it with him to his chair.

During the tippling of the first bottle the sense of ill-usage that had afflicted Lanpher since his departure from Farewell had dwindled and died. A pleasant feeling of friendliness for the world at large had taken its place. Even the nester Lorimer and Red Kane were no longer Lanpher's enemies. They had their faults, naturally, but it was a free country, live and let live, bear and forbear—this was the way to get along. Quite so.

But the first drink of the rye made Lanpher strangely thirsty for another. A second swallow, a third, two gulps in succession, and Lanpher's state of mellow bonhomie vanished in a breath. A vile and ugly humor took its place. Which humor grew by degrees viler and uglier.

By three in the morning the floor round the table was thickly strewn with dead cigaret-butts, high-tide in the bottle was half-way down the label, and Lanpher was fairly seething with the bitter realization of his wrongs. He hated the Bar S, Old Man Saltoun, Red Kane and the nester—above all Lorimer the nester.

Lanpher set the bottle neck to his lips. When he took it away he puffed his cigaret to a bright glow and held it behind the bottle.

"Not more'n three drinks left," he said aloud. "Nearly two quarts an' I ain't drunk yet. Hand's just as steady."

He held the cigaret at arm's length to prove it. The glowing spark hung motionless. Lanpher did not know that his intoxication was mainly mental. But he knew that a great strength and a greater courage permeated his being. He felt strong enough to lift a horse, and he was afraid of nothing. For the Bar S, its owner and punchers, he did not give a single damn. Should any or all of that —— outfit attempt to jump sidewise at him, he would show them what was what. He, Lanpher of the 88, would run them off the range so far they'd need four years to ride back. They had run blazers on him long enough. He'd stand no more nonsense from them, and he called his Maker to bear witness that he wouldn't. As to that nester, Lorimer, the man who had helped steal the ten thousand dollars belonging to the 88, the man who had skinned him out of his bonus, as to that unmentionable dog, he would die the death.

"I'll hang him, by ——!" Lanpher snarled in a whisper. "I'll burn his shack an' his wagons an' run off his stock. That daughter o' his can cash for all I care. She's got no business havin' a daddy like hers."

Nearly two quarts of indifferent whisky will shatter almost any human being's sense of proportion. Lanpher picked up the bottle and made it an even two quarts.

He lowered the bottle, held it to his ear and shook it, but he could hear no answering guggle and swash. He set the bottle down regretfully and wished for another. Luckily there was no other nearer than Farewell. No man may tuck away three quarts of raw liquor at a sitting and continue on top of ground.

It struck him that the windows and doorway were beginning to stand out grayly against the darkness. The day was coming. Lanpher went to the doorway and looked out. A faint lemon-yellow streaked low in the east. Across the way a sudden sharp flare of light outlined the windows of the cook-shack. Cookie had arisen.

Lanpher went outside. He filled his lungs with the clean-washed air of dawn and licked his thin lips cat-fashion. He walked to the corral and back without a perceptible stagger. Continually he ran his hand through his tousled hair. In all that he did, he was conscious of no physical effort.

"I guess the boys won't do no woodcuttin' today," he said to himself. "No, I guess not."

At breakfast the outfit noticed that their manager's eyes were overbright, his face and nose overred and his tongue overtalkative. It was an odd species of hangover, but, after all, it was his own affair. When the first man through piled his cup and plate and pushed them from him,

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Lanpher leaned forward, his face sharp-drawn and eager.

"No wood-cuttin' today, boys," he said in a voice that was the least bit thick. "We're gonna go an' call on that nester that sifted through here a while ago—him with the two wagons and the female daughter. The one I told to git an' he wouldn't. He's took root over at Sweetwater Mountain. We're gonna take our ropes along an' we're gonna stretch him."

The punchers looked at him in amazed silence. What was the matter with Lanpher? Why couldn't he let the poor devil alone? Sweetwater Mountain was over on the Cross-in-a-box range anyway. Let Jack Ritchie and his men attend to him. Besides, the nester's daughter was remarkably pretty. They were exceedingly human, these punchers of the 88.

"Whatcha wanna stretch him for?" asked Tom Dowling.

"Because he knows who stole fifty thousand dollars from the express company an' he won't tell. Ten thousand dollars of it was money assigned to me to buy cattle with. Ten thousand wheels! An' this jigger won't open his yap. He'll stand hangin'."

"I should remark!" cried Rockwell, swinging his legs over the bench.

"Why ain't he been lynched already by the Farewell bunch?" queried shrewd Tom Dowling. "Don't they know about it?"

"Shore they do," declared Lanpher, flashing his rodent-like grin on Tom Dowling. "Shore they do, but Kansas Casey won't let 'em do nothin' till they get more proof. But me, I got proof enough. I know he's a coyote an' a road-agent, an' I know he knows all about that money. Why, gents, he even had some o' the gold in his pocket. They found part of it on him, an' Kansas says it ain't enough yet. By ——, it's enough for me!"

Judging by the expeditious manner in which they left the dining-room and broke for the corrals, it was enough for them also.

CHAPTER XI

THE WARNING

WHEN Red Kane came out of the Happy Heart the dust of Lanpher's going, quiescent in the windless air, hung above the southern trail.

"Wonder if Lanpher has drifted," said Red Kane.

"Nemmine wonderin' about Lanpher," was the advice of Kansas Casey, "or you'n me'n Old Salt'll have to traipse right back inside an' belly the bar again. I ain't gonna have no gun-play in Farewell today, Red, nor tomorrow neither. You let Lanpher be, like a good feller."

"Puttin' her thataway," Red grumbled, "they's only one thing to do. But yo're takin' a lot on yourself, Kansas. I dunno as I like it. Maybe I'd feel better if we hopped in an' asked the barkeep the time o' day once more. How about it?"

"No, not another one," Mr. Saltoun replied firmly. "I wish yuh'd go down to the blacksmith shop, Red, an' ride herd on that lazy, no-account Piney Jackson till he gets the buckboard fixed. He's a-layin' down on the job. I've knowed him since General Forsyth's fight on the Republican, an' he ain't changed a mite. Not a mite. An' look here, Red, yo're a good puncher an' a hard worker an' I like yuh a lot, but I'm with Kansas in this Lanpher business. Don't go projeckin' round huntin' trouble with him if he's still in town. The Bar S is gettin' along right peaceable lately with the 88, an' business is so good I don't want it bothered."

"You was talkin' up to him yourself," complained Red.

"I wasn't lookin' for a fight."

"Me neither. Whadda I wanna go fightin' for? I'm peaceable. I don't carry no chips on my shoulder or nothin'. I like Lanpher. I wouldn't wish him no harm for a lot."

"Shore, I know all about that, Red. We all know yo're a li'l' he-lamb. Whatcha snickerin' at, Kansas? Don'tcha mind him, Red. He can't help it, the poor feller. Before I forget it, Tim Page wants a new pair of leather cuffs an' a green silk handkerchief, a big one. Here's the money. I'd get 'em myself, only Mike's out some'ers an' Miss Blythe dunno where the cuffs are, an' I gotta drag it. I been wastin' time round here long enough. An', Red, if Piney gets the buckboard fixed before the stage pulls in, wait till after an' get the mail."

Piney was finishing the last spoke when Red entered the blacksmith shop and took a precarious seat on the edge of the cooling-tub.

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"Yuh'd oughta have her done tonight," said Red hopefully, eying the amount of completed work.

"Done nothin'," retorted Piney with an oily smile. "Yo're lucky if yuh get that there buckboard tomorrow night. Why, Red, yuh'd be surprized at the size o' this job. They's always somethin' new croppin' up. I thought this mornin' when I seen the fifth wheel had a crack that they wasn't no more damage, but now, Red—an' I was surprized, too, 'cause I'd looked it over real careful—now, this afternoon, I found I gotta make two new nave-bands an' a understrap. Them nave-bands gotta be fitted careful, yuh know, Red. That's one job I can't hurry.

"Huh? Me slow? Well, I shore like that. Which yo're the hardest gent to please I ever did see. An' me a-slavin' like a Turk this weather so's to finish up for yuh. I had to make all new fellys too, Red. It wasn't only the spokes. An' I s'pose you think I didn't have no shoein' to do. This buckboard ain't the only thing I live for, naw, sir. Had two mules an' a hoss today awready. If yuh wanna make yoreself useful, Red, s'pose you hop out an' light up a round fire to heat this tire. That's just s'posin' yo're in a hurry. Me, I don't care how long it takes. I'm good-natured, I am. I don't holler an' fret 'cause other folks ain't got six or seven arms an' legs apiece an' turn out work a mile a minute. I'm reasonable. Didja say le's go have a drink, Red?"

"I did not!" shouted the exasperated Red. "I said le's get this buckboard fixed an' be quick about it. Why don'tcha make a new one an' be done with it?"

"I would if I thought Old Salt'd pay the bill. Honest, a new buckboard wouldn't hurt him none, the tightwad."

"Nemmine whether he's a tightwad or not," cried Red loyally. "He don't run up a —— of a big bill for nothin' but a measly old wheel or two an' some busted wrought iron. Yeah, I mean you, y'old fraud. Be ready with that tire. I'll have yore fire in two shakes."

Tom Kane came along while the tire was heating.

"Learnin' to be a blacksmith, Red?" he asked of his now smutty-faced brother.

"Naw, I'm learnin' Piney to be one. Lordy, Tom, the ignorance o' this feller is shore pitiful. But he's comin' along. He'll make a hand some day. Yessir, it wouldn't surprize me none if inside six months he'll be able to tell the difference between a rasp an' the forehammer. Don'tcha think so yoreself, Piney."

"I think this tire's about right," grinned Piney. "Grab them long-handled pincers, Reddy, old settler, an' we'll swing her over on the wheel. Ready—now."

"There," said Red, surveying the properly tired wheel four minutes later, "that's what I call a reg'lar job. Couldn't be no better if I'd 'a' done it all myself. How about them nave-bands now, Piney?"

But Piney was squinting northward along the dusty length of Main Street. A rider was coming into town, his tall gray horse single-footing wearily. Above the patter of the horse's hoofs sounded the double click of a loose shoe.

"No nave-bands yet a while, Red," said Piney Jackson. "Yonder's a customer a-comin'. Hear that loose shoe clackin' on the near fore, an' the off fore ain't got none a-tall, an'——"

"An' the hoss has two hairs missin' out of his tail besides," interrupted Red, "an' is seven year old comin' eight, an' the feller a-ridin' him has got a blond-headed wife an' four children, all girls, one of 'em cross-eyed. You'd oughta be a fortune-teller, Piney."

"Anyway, that hoss ain't shod behind neither," Piney declared resentfully.

"That's a easy guess," said Red, "they ain't many round here shoes behind."

The rider on the gray came straight to the blacksmith shop and dismounted. He was a stranger, this rider, slim-bodied, with wide shoulders and a wide, unsmiling mouth.

"The li'l' hoss cast a shoe this mornin'," said the stranger to Piney, "an' he's fixin' to cast the other, I guess. Anybody ahead o' me?"

"Only a wagon job," replied the blacksmith, taking the gray's bridle. "Hosses always come first. Want him shod behind? Them feet are kind o' beginnin' to chip a li'l bit."

"Might's well shoe him all round," nodded the stranger. "Shoe him medium heavy. He'll stand it. He's no daisy-cutter."

He nodded again, turned abruptly and headed across the street toward the Starlight Saloon.

"Rawhide hoss," said Tom Kane, his

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critical eyes sweeping over the gray's build.

"Too long-legged," was Red's verdict.

"Got a corn comin'," vouchsafed the blacksmith, who, the near fore between his knees, was wrenching off the shoe with the pincers. "An' I got just one bar shoe his size left in the place. Hope the other foot's all right. ——fi wanna make a bar shoe."

"Why don'tcha cut away the outside wall an' use a plain shoe?" suggested Red, anxious to expedite matters as much as possible.

"That'd be just about what you'd do!" Piney exclaimed in fine scorn. "But, when a hoss goes out o' here, he's shod proper, lemme tell yuh. I'll cut away the horn o' the outside wall all right, an' I'll shoe with a bar shoe so's the frog takes the weight. A plain shoe, huh! I never tacked a plain shoe on a hoss with corns yet, an' I ain't gonna begin now. Why, in the Sioux campaign o' '69 I've knowed General Forsyth to peg out a blacksmith for gettin' brash with hosses' feet thataway. Just before the fight on the Republican River, an' Old Salt'll tell yuh the same—he was there too—just before that fracas——"

"C'mon, Tom," Red Kane besought in mock alarm, plucking his brother by the sleeve, "Piney's gonna plant them Injuns again. He dunno the war's over. C'mon before we lose our arms an' legs."

THEY departed, laughing, followed by much earnest abuse hurled by the irritated blacksmith.

"Good feller, Piney," said Red Kane, turning into the Starlight.

"Shore," assented Tom, "only he can't never forget he used to fork a Army tree. The bottle with the sawbuck," he told the bartender, "an' trot out a box o' yore cigars."

"The best," supplemented Red. "No cabbages nor ol' rope neither for us two li'l' orphans."

Red Kane, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, cupped his right hand round his glass and leaned comfortably against the bar.

At the other end of the bar stood the slim-bodied, wide-shouldered stranger. He paid no attention to any of the other customers. With the bottom of his whisky glass he was making little wet rings on the surface of the bar. Occasionally he would draw long and deeply at the cigaret hanging from his lower lip and slowly blow out the smoke through his nostrils.

Red, regarding him casually, perceived that which had at first escaped his attention—the stranger had inordinately small feet. Red's own feet, in common with those of most cowboys, were not large, but the stranger's were a deal smaller. No woman need have been ashamed to take the size boot he wore.

Red's idle eyes became aware that the stranger's boots were an excellent pair, well-made and nearly new. The heels were straight, square-set. About the spurs there was no touch of silver-inlaid fancy work. They were plain, hand-forged steel spurs, with rowels larger than usually prevailed on the northern ranges. One of the rowel points was broken short off.

"I heard yuh throwed down on Carlson," said Tom in a low tone.

"I had to." Red turned toward his brother. "Yuh see——"

"Here he comes now," Tom interrupted.

The thickset figure of Carlson pushed through the doorway and walked straight toward Red Kane. The latter, alert as the proverbial weasel, shifted position slightly. His right hand dropped at his side. Carlson grinned pacifically.

"No hard feelin's," he said, fronting up to the bar at Red's side. "Anyhow, not from where I'm standin'."

"Which is goin' the limit," declared Red with a smile. "What's fairer than that? Barkeep, another glass. Here's the bottle, Carlson. Drink hearty."

Carlson drank, set down his glass and looked straight into Red's eyes.

"Look out for Lenn an' Dill," he whispered. "I've a notion they're a-layin' for yuh. So long."

Without another word Carlson departed.

"What'd he say?" queried Tom.

Red told him. Tom's mouth straightened and he hitched up his belt.

"They's always two of us in our family," he said. "—— white o' Carlson, but," he qualified, knowing his town and its people, "I kind o' guess he done it only 'cause he's more hostyle to Lenn an' Dill than he is to you."

"I ain't doin' no worryin' why he done it," said Red the practical. "He done it, an' I'm gonna go search out them two fellers an' give 'em a chance to spring their joke."

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"They's nothin' like doin' things on the jump," concurred Tom.

They went out, these two brothers, and, because they did not know the disposition of the enemy, they walked one behind the other, a distance of thirty yards between them.

They went directly to the dance-hall. Lenn did not go on duty behind the bar till seven o'clock in the evening, but it was the man's habit to infest the place even in his leisure moments.

Red and Tom entered the dance-hall from different entrances. It is a point in military strategy to fall upon the enemy from flank and front simultaneously. Neither of the two brothers had ever heard of Murat or Marlborough, but no commander of troops could have timed his onfall at a more opportune moment than they did theirs. Entering the dance-hall by way of the rear and side doors simultaneously, they found the enemy unbraced and unready.

Spunk Lenn had even partially dismounted his six-shooter. The cylinder lay on the bar beside a freshly broken box of cartridges. Spunk Lenn, holding a piece of paper against the recoil plate to reflect the light, was looking through the barrel. He was cold sober. So was not Pickles Dill. This gentleman was leaning against the bar and orating in maudlin tones.

Red and Tom had heard Mr. Dill's voice as they came up the street, but the words had been indistinguishable for that Mr. Dill's delivery was thick and rather sketchy. Once they were under the same roof with Mr. Dill they could understand him perfectly.

"Nawzir," Mr. Dill was saying, thumping the bar with a dirty fist and nodding his head solemnly at every thump, "nawzir, I don' care how fuf-fast he is with a gugu-gug-gun. I'm pup-pup-pretty fuf-fast m'ownself."

Inspired by similar hunches, Red and Tom halted just within their respective doorways. Their entry had gone unperceived. Besides Messrs. Lenn, Dill, themselves and the day bartender, there was no one else in the dance-hall. And the day bartender, a fat-brained chucklehead, was oblivious to everything but the antics and speech of Pickles Dill.

"You better go to bed, Pickles," advised Mr. Lenn, busy with a rawhide pull-through. "You ain't in no condition to act hostyle. You go to bed like a good feller."

But the "good feller" stood firmer in his convictions than he did on his legs.

"You—you mum-mean I'm drunk," he said with a hiccup. "Why don'tcha shay sho right out shus-stead o' hintin' run-round thishway. Well, I ain't drunk; I'm shober's you are. Shoberer, by ——. An' I feel lul-like hoppin' out after him. I'm gug-gonna do it. I'll ride the li'l' hoss all round his collar. I'll make him eat hish own sush-shix-shooter, that's what I'll do. I'm gonna dud-do it, I tell yuh that fuf-flat. I'm gonna do it now. You come along an' wash me fuf-fill Red Kane full o' lead."

He started teeteringly in the general direction of the front door. Spunk Lenn seized him by the elbow and swung him hard on into the bar.

"Have another drink, Pickles," he invited. Then to the bartender in an undertone, "Give it to him in a tin cup. That oughta fix him so's I can get him to bed without a fuss."

Red Kane could, on occasion, move silently. He did so on this occasion. When the bartender straightened his body after bending down to a lower shelf for a tin cup, Red Kane was leaning nonchalantly against the far end of the bar. The bartender, holding tin cup and bottle in his hands, froze stiff. No doubt it was the chill that made the bottle and cup tinkle pleasantly together.

Mr. Lenn looked at the bartender in surprize. Then his eyes followed the eyes of the bartender. Mr. Lenn was no catch-as-catch-can individual. He did not lose his head. Not knowing how much or how little Red Kane had heard, he chose to put the burden of opening a conflict upon the puncher.

Red silently gazed upon Mr. Lenn and the maudlin Mr. Dill. The latter's wandering eyes had not rested upon Mr. Kane as yet. Nor had they perceived the other Mr. Kane, who had come up from the rear and assumed an attitude of lazy carelessness in a chair across the room. But Mr. Lenn had observed the other Mr. Kane and the other Mr. Kane's choice of position, and it had not increased his peace of mind.

Honor, the proverb to the contrary notwithstanding, does not always obtain among thieves. It does not always remain afloat between friends. Mr. Lenn and Mr. Dill

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were ostensibly friends, and, now that danger actually threatened Mr. Lenn pushed Mr. Dill into deep water without a qualm. In so doing, Mr. Lenn's purpose may have been deeper than the water. He may have expected Mr. Kane to shoot a drunken man, thereby gaining the disapproval of the multitude. For there is a well-grounded prejudice against inflicting bodily injury upon one overserved with liquor.

Whatever Mr. Lenn's expectations, it is history that he reached across the bar and tapped the witless bartender on a trembling elbow.

"Gonna choke that bottle to death?" Mr. Lenn demanded severely.

The bartender jerkily placed cup and bottle before Mr. Lenn. The latter poured a stiffish drink into the tin cup and shoved the cup into the hand of Mr. Dill.

"Drink hearty," urged Mr. Lenn.

Mr. Dill, raising the cup to his lips, half-turned toward his friend.

Across Mr. Lenn's shoulder Mr. Dill perceived Mr. Kane standing near the end of the bar. In effect, he saw two Mr. Kanes. While he looked, the two became three. Which phenomena intrigued Mr. Dill.

He set down the tin cup without drinking and laughed crazily.

"Lul-look," he said, pointing a shaking arm and hand. "Lul-look. There's Red Kuk-Kane nun-now."

"Yeah," murmured Mr. Lenn in the tone of one who has forgotten something, "I see him."

Mr. Lenn slipped to the rear of Mr. Dill.

"They's two o' yuh, Ru-Red," said Mr. Dill with a puzzled frown. "I didn't know yuh was twins." Mr. Dill's wavering gaze staggered sidewise and embraced Red Kane's brother Tom where he sat on his chair against the side wall. "An' Tom's twins, too," Mr. Dill went on distractedly. "I dud-don't understan' it. Whysh Ru-Red twins an' whysh Tom twins too. Both of 'em tut-twins, an' I wanna know why. Cuc-can you tell me why?"

He wheeled inward and stabbed an uncertain forefinger at the bartender.

"I—" began the bartender.

"My ——!" cried Mr. Dill. "Yo're twins, too! An' Spuh—Spuh—Spunk, he's twins. An' that —— bottle's tut-twins."

He reached for the bottle and, naturally, miscalculated and clutched a handful of air. He grabbed again, wildly, and overset the bottle. It rolled across the bar, over the edge and smashed on the floor. The mishap annoyed Mr. Dill.

"What didja do that for?" he roared at the bartender. Then, his mood changing on the instant, he began to weep. "Poor li'l' bottle," he moaned. "Never did no harm to nobody. All broke to pieces. Poor li'l' bottle."

He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and sniffled. Obviously he had completely forgotten ever having borne malice toward Red Kane. Mr. Lenn was at a loss. His eyes flickered nervously.

Red Kane smiled. He had shrewdly suspected the evil intent at the back of Mr. Lenn's mind.

"Throw the red-eye into him, Spunk, why don'tcha?" he queried. "Then maybe he'll get his dander up."

"Whatcha talkin' about?" Thus Mr. Lenn, wearing his best expression of wondering innocence.

"Me? Yuh mean me? Yuh mean what am I talkin' about, huh? Oh, I was just a-talkin'. I do that now an' then. Kind of a habit with me. Djuh know, Spunk, I'll bet another drink would help his memory."

" 'His memory,' " repeated Mr. Lenn.

"Shore, his memory. Ain't he forgot somethin'?"

"I dunno what yo're talkin' about," declared Mr. Lenn palely. He felt queerly within, did Mr. Lenn. Red Kane seemed bent on forcing a fight. Every advantage lay with the puncher. Mr. Lenn cursed Pickles Dill and his loose tongue.

"If you ain't gonna give him that drink, you'd oughta take him home," Red Kane pointed out kindly. "He ain't in no condition to leave loose on the range, Pickles ain't. Look at him, Spunk. He's fallin' asleep right now this minute."

Even as Red spoke, Mr. Dill, who had been clinging limpet-like to the bar, relaxed his hold, slid gently to the floor, buried his nose in his hat and began to snore.

"Pack him into the back room," Mr. Lenn said to the bartender and started to leave the dance-hall.

The voice of Red Kane halted Mr. Lenn before he reached the door.

"Yo're forgettin' somethin', too," said Red Kane.

There! It had come, the challenge. Mr. Lenn's scared nerves read a menace into

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Red's simple words. He whirled, his body crouching, his right hand jerking down and up.

Fully expecting to meet the flash and smoke of Red's six-shooter, he pulled the trigger three times before he realized that his hammer was clicking vainly and that Red's thumbs remained hooked in his belt.

"Told yuh yuh'd forgot somethin'," observed Red Kane calmly. "Yore cylinder. Yuh left it layin' on top of the bar."

Mr. Lenn perceived with shame that Red Kane was telling the truth. He looked at the empty frame of his gun with sullen eyes.

"I expect yo're a-wishin' that cylinder had been in place," Red Kane observed softly. "Is that it?"

Mr. Lenn shook his head.

"I thought—" he began.

"Nemmine whatcha thought," interrupted Red Kane. "It don't signify—really. Only—only I'd be kind o' careful how I throwed down on folks, feller. Yessir, I'd shore be a heap careful. S'pose now, Spunk, you pick up yore li'l' tin cylinder an' pull yore freight. I get tired lookin' at yuh sometimes. Speakin' plain, Spunk, I'd drag it out o' town if I was you. Yessir, I shore would. An', if I was a gent thoughtful of my health, I'd do it inside o' ten minutes. Yuh see, feller, I'm gonna go down to Tom's now after my Winchester. Then I'm comin' back, an' I'm gonna scout round for you, an', if yo're anyways visible, I'll give yuh the whole magazine. That's the how of it, Spunk."

CHAPTER XII

A WILD TIME

INTO this lively situation blundered headforemost the owner of the dance-hall. The late Mr. Stute's successor, one "Figgy" Wadsworth. A plumpish man, Figgy's mental processes were slow, but he was sufficiently bright to sense a certain tension in the atmosphere. He turned a moon face from one to another of those present.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, wrinkling an anxious forehead.

He wished no violence in his place. Violence he abhorred. Violence and a too active participation in public affairs had been the death of Mr. Stute, the erstwhile proprietor. In his mind's eye Figgy could still see the white form of Mr. Stute—he was hanged in his nightshirt—a-dangle against the sky. As a dance-hall owner honest Figgy was decidedly miscast. He should have been born a periwinkle.

"What's the trouble?" he repeated. "Don't start nothin' now, Spunk. This here's a respectable place, an' I'm aimin' to keep it so. I don't wanna get mixed up in no gun-plays myself, an' I don't want none in here. Whatcha fussin' with a customer for, anyhow? I've told yuh time an' again to hang on to yore temper in here. It drives away trade to have a barkeep a-rowin' alla time. Folks don't come in here for a fracas. They come in for a drink, y' understand. Whatsa trouble, anyhow? I've done asked yuh three times."

"If yuh'd waited after the first time instead o' surgin' hell-bent into a sermon, I'd 'a' told yuh," snarled Spunk Lenn. "They ain't no trouble. I'm playin' cat's-cradle with my gun. Whadda yuh guess?"

"Spunk's tellin' the truth—for once," remarked Red Kane. "But I dunno as I'm a heap anxious to keep on playin' cat's-cradle with Spunk. He's too swift for me or somethin'. I like to gamble, but a shore thing is too much. Spunk is leavin' our midst."

Fat Figgy stared and scratched the top of his head, where the hair grew sparsely.

"He's leavin'? Whadda yuh mean?" Again Figgy scratched the top of his head.

"I mean yuh'll have to look round for a new night barkeep," explained Red Kane. "Yuh see, Figgy, Spunk's decided to shoo himself away. Spunk," he continued, his light tone becoming hard, "don't lemme keep you. Yore cylinder is still on top o' the bar. Lessee how fast yuh can pick it up an' get out o' that door."

"If it wasn't for yore brother behind me," said Mr. Lenn, stepping to the bar and retrieving his property, "I'd shoot it out with yuh."

"No, that's not yore reason, Spunk. Never say so. Tom's bein' behind yuh has nothin' to do with it. You ain't got the nerve. You hear me. You ain't got the nerve. If yuh had the nerve, yuh'd slip in yore cylinder, slam home yore centerpin an' turn yore bull loose. See, my hand ain't no more'n reasonable close to my six-shooter an' you got yore gun out."

Spunk Lenn's fingers ceased moving.

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The cylinder remained half in half out of the frame.

"Huh?" Mr. Lenn looked frowningly at Mr. Kane.

"I'm tellin' yuh y'ain't got the nerve to cut down on me again. Y'ain't got the nerve, an' right now this minute I'm gonna see how li'l' nerve you really have got."

Red Kane sprang forward and landed a jab on the nose of Mr. Lenn. The latter, with a squeak of anguish, promptly essayed to complete the assembling of his six-shooter. But Red Kane did not wait on the convenience of Mr. Lenn. He bored in, keeping his elbows close to his ribs, and landed heavily on Mr. Lenn's eye and ear. The cylinder flew from Spunk Lenn's fingers. He struck savagely at his opponent with the barrel of the weapon. Red Kane dodged the blow, wrenched the six-shooter from the hands of Mr. Lenn and clipped him across the mouth with it.

Spitting blood and three teeth, Mr. Lenn lowered his head and charged Red Kane. Which move was most ill-advised. Red Kane raised a hard knee and smote Mr. Lenn on his already painful nose.

With a sound midway between a grunt and a groan Mr. Lenn went over backward and landed full on the stomach of the sleeping Mr. Dill. This was lucky for Lenn. Otherwise he would have broken his neck. The stricken Pickles, as his comrade rolled off his stomach, doubled up like a closing jack-knife. He wheezed and gasped, clutching his middle the while with both hands. Then nausea seized him, and he wallowed like a pig under the feet of the fighting men.

Mr. Lenn, when he arose again, charged his antagonist. But not head down this time. He had learned that lesson. He went forward swinging both fists, only to go down flat beneath a veritable shower of hooks and jabs to the face.

Red Kane did not know that the blows he was delivering so well were hooks and jabs. He had never seen a prize-fight, and of fistic science he was naturally as ignorant as a Mennonite maid. But he was a willing worker, had plenty of instinct and was hard as the proverbial keg of nails. The ex-bartender could not go the distance with the cowboy. But there are more ways than one of winning a fight, especially when the row is unhampered with rules.

From his latest knockdown Mr. Lenn arose slowly. There was blood on his face and murder in his heart. Moreover, there was craft in his brain and a bowie under his vest. He was so consumed with rage engendered by the acute pain of his hurts that he had long since forgotten to be afraid. Some men are like that.

Mr. Lenn, swaying on his feet, was not nearly so weary as he looked. He shook his head as if to clear it and dashed the blood from his fast-closing eyes with the back of a bruised left hand. His right arm he kept across his middle, the forearm parallel to and immediately above his belt, the fist close in to the points of the open vest.

He crouched and tottered toward Red Kane. The latter was calmly awaiting an opportunity to administer to Mr. Lenn his quietus. A right or left swing neatly planted beneath an ear or on the point of the jaw would be best, Red decided as he watched the advance of his battered antagonist.

Spunk Lenn gave every indication of a man almost out on his feet. He gasped like a netted fish. His knees wabbled beneath him. As acting it was badly overdone, but Mr. Lenn's audience was not disposed to be critical.

Red Kane, in his unblissful ignorance, set himself to send over the knockout. Mr. Lenn appeared to give way suddenly. He sank down almost to the floor. He rested his left hand on the floor to steady himself. His body bowed forward. The outswinging flap of his vest completely concealed his right hand.

Then his slack body straightened with a snap from the heels and he sprang forward and upward. No catamount could have been brisker. Mr. Lenn's right hand shot out from beneath the vest. There were eight inches of gray steel projecting from that right hand, and with all the strength of his arm and shoulder Mr. Lenn stabbed straight at Red Kane's stomach.

Yet the Spinning Sisters fought for Red Kane that day. Had the puncher been going away at the moment, nothing could have prevented the grooved blade from ripping up his vitals. But he was coming in at the psychological nick and he met the blow half-way. The point of the bowie struck one of the brass conchas on his chaps, glanced and did no more material damage than slit the leather over his hip-bone.

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Red would have been perfectly justified had he stepped back, pulled his gun and filled the crafty Mr. Lenn full of holes. But even then, with Mr. Lenn gathering himself for another murderous effort, Red did not draw his firearm. Instead, he hopped to one side, snatched up a handy chair and flailed Mr. Lenn across the face with it.

Mr. Lenn dropped his knife and reeled backward. He was suffering the most exquisite torture, for a chair leg had rapped his funny-bone and a corner of the chair seat had deprived him of three more of his most prominent teeth and broken his nose. He gave vent in his agony to a shrill ululation that Red Kane cut short with another swing of the useful chair. Mr. Lenn tumbled senseless into the angle between the bar and the front wall and lay huddled, a sadly crumpled human being.

Red Kane gazed down at his handiwork and flung the chair from him.

"Y'oughta make yore chairs heavier," he observed to the marveling Figgy. "If the one I used had five more pounds heft I'd 'a' knocked him silly first crack."

"My ——!" breathed the awed Figgy. "My ——! I never seen nothin' like it since I was born. Yuh—yuh wouldn't hardly think they's a real face behind all that blood an' mush."

"Yuh'd oughta shot the polecat," Tom reproached his brother. "I'd 'a' done it. Don'tcha see, yuh idjit, instead o' windin' the play up like yuh waded out to do so careless an' free, yuh've just started a new deal. But maybe yuh rubbed him out after all," he added, brightening perceptibly. "Lessee."

Tom crossed to the battered Mr. Lenn and fingered his person at various points of vantage. Red Kane scooped up the discarded bowie, revolver-frame and cylinder and tossed the lot through the doorway into the street. The ironmongery slithered at the feet of that semi-invalid, Mr. Cox, who, attracted by the shortened shrieks of Mr. Lenn, was coming along the sidewalk. Mr. Cox, surmising by the very shrillness of the screams that one of the dance-hall girls was indulging in delirium tremens and fearing to miss some part of the excitement, hurried blithely up. His expectant grin became even more expectant at sight of the shower of hardware. She was throwing things. She would no doubt furnish plenty of amusement. He wondered why she had stopped screaming.

"I guess he'll live, all right," Tom Kane was saying regretfully when Mr. Cox entered. "He's breathin' right good an' I don't think his skull's fractured. Shore tough luck that chair bein' so light."

"Here's Coxy," cried Red joyously. "Good ol' Coxy, lame arm an' all. How's the pin, old settler?"

But the old settler was in no mood for idle banter—at least not from the tongue of Red Kane. He had not forgotten what Red had said to him at the ranch-house by Sweetwater Mountain. The grin faded abruptly from the mouth of Mr. Cox as he faced the laughing devil in Red's gray eyes. The eyes of Mr. Cox shifted quickly to the object that had at one time been a perfectly good bartender.

If Mr. Cox could not recognize the features, he recognized the clothing. His expression grew very glum.

"Don't look so happy," suggested the impudent Red. "Ain'tcha sorry for Spunk even a little bit? Where's yore sympathy?"

This was rubbing it in with a vengeance. Cox's sidewise glance at Red was savage.

"Yeah," said Cox. "I'm sorry for Spunk all right, an' I got sympathy to burn. Don'tcha worry none about that. I even got sympathy for you, Red."

"Why me? Do I look like I needed it?"

"Yuh'll need it all right. Yuh'll need it a-plenty."

"That sounds real interestin'," drawled Red. "Who's gonna make me need sympathy?"

But Rooster Cox was not to be drawn further. One corner of his malicious mouth lifted in a crooked smile and he departed, nursing his injured arm.

"Gonna tell Durkin," thought Red contemptuously. "Figgy," he said aloud, "when Spunk comes to, tell him I'll stretch out his ten minutes till tomorrow mornin' at six o'clock. I'll be lookin' for him after six. C'mon, Tom."

CHAPTER XIII

THE DARK PLACES

"WILL this be large enough?"

The attractive Miss Blythe, Mike Flynn's partner in the Blue Pigeon, spread a green silk handkerchief upon the counter.

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"I guess," said Red Kane, "Tim shore ought to be pleased with that. Yes, ma'am, cuffs an' the handkerchief will be all. Nemmine wrappin' up the cuffs. I'll tie them on the saddle, but yuh can put a piece o' newspaper round the handkerchief if yuh will. Don't wanna git it dirty if I can help it. Where's the man-talkin' parrot?"

"Out back," she twinkled, nodding her head toward the sleeping-quarters of Mike Flynn. "I won't have the horrid thing in here while I'm tending store. Such language I never listened to in all my born days. Seven dollars and four-bits, Mr. Kane."

"Betcha yo're buyin' them things for yourself," Tom observed skeptically when he and his brother were walking homeward.

"I was not," denied Red. "They're for Tim Page, like I said. S'pose Tim wants to be fancy for once. He shore oughta be in that handkerchief. She's a right outstandin' green."

"Alla same, I'll bet they ain't for Tim," insisted Tom. "Yo're fixin' on goin' out to Sweetwater Mountain again, an' yuh wanna look joyful. Can't fool me. I know you, old-timer. Nemmine denyin' it. I wouldn't believe yuh if yuh told me till yuh was blue in the face. My ——, Red, you make me sick! Whadda yuh wanna go get married for? I don't mind a fool. Gotta expect that, but it ain't necessary to be a —— fool, an' you personal are actin' like the ——est fool ever drawed breath. You mark what I'm tellin' yuh, Red, you'll be sorry. You'll be sorry shore as yo're a foot high. Look at me—I'm single; I'm happy; I'm makin' money. What more djuh want? What more can yuh want? Hell's bells, djuh want a woman tellin' yuh how many pills yuh can smoke an' supervisin' yore drinks?

"Think o' that, Red. Can't go into the Happy Heart for the smallest kind of a snifter without havin' yore wife askin' about it an' objectin' like one o' my mules when Piney Jackson shoes him. An', if y'ever got an edge on, Red, an' brought it home with yuh, she'd raise the roof. That's the kind o' hairpin a wife is. I know; I got married friends, an' they told me.

"Now shut up. Lemme talk. You'll have plenty time to jaw while I'm rustlin' the chuck. You take yore Dot Lorimer friend now. She's got a temper, she has. S'pose yuh don't do everythin' to suit her—forget to chop the light wood or somethin'. What'll she do, huh? She won't say much. Not her. She ain't that sort. She'll take the hatchet or a rollin'-pin an' beat the drum on yore face. That's what she'll do."

"Maybe I'll like it, Tom," grinned the amused Red. "When yuh like a person, yuh like what they do to yuh. Look at me now. Yo're a-whangin' at me with yore tongue, an' I ain't sayin' a word. Shows I like yuh. Yuh don't appreciate it neither. Fine brother, you are."

"I know when I'm well off, you bet. I ain't doin' my endeavors to stick my head through the loop of a rope. I ain't got nothin' in petticoats to boss me round, an' I ain't gonna have nothin' neither. Single cussedness, that's me."

"You'll be followin' my trail in less'n a year, maybe sooner. You'll see."

"I will like ——. Not while I know how to cook I won't. They's ham tonight, Red. Ham'n' 'taters. Wanna wait while I make biscuits? All right. Grab the ax an' split the light wood for tomorrow mornin' an' tomorrow night, too, while yo're about it. Yuh might's well learn bein' useful, cowboy. Then yuh won't mind it so much later."

Tom nimbly dodged through the doorway of his shack and slammed the door just as a stick of stove-wood crashed against the planking.

"Alla same, he's the —— fool," Red told himself, as he twiddled the ax out of the chopping block. "I don't believe she'd act thataway."

It was in the small hours of the morning when Tom Kane, sleeping the sleep of a tired man, was smartly cracked on the head by a heavy article. He came alive on the instant, bounced upright and automatically felt for his six-shooter. Beside his bunk, dimly visible in the pale light of the early dawn, stood the dark figure of his brother.

" 'T'sall right!" Red cried hastily. "I was only tryin' to find out what time it was without wakin' yuh, an' the alarm-clock dropped on yore face."

"My ear," corrected Tom huffily, cautiously fingering the organ in question. "It dropped on my ear, yuh butter-fingered hay-maker. It might 'a' put out my eye if I'd been a-layin' like I do usual. Why didn'tcha strike a match if yuh wanted to find out the time?"

"I didn't wanna wake yuh up," explained

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Red. "I knowed yuh wouldn't wanna be waked up, so I tried to take the clock over to the window where they was some light. Y'oughtn't to keep the thing on a shelf right over yore bed. No place for a clock nohow. Next time yuh might get damaged instead o' just batted on the ear. Lordy, what a time yuh make for just a ear."

"Oh, is that so?" snapped Tom, while his brother struck a match and held it in front of the clock's face. "Yuh talk like I have several ears an' could easy afford to have one of 'em hammered flat any time you feel like it. Well, I can't, an' I won't, an' you do any more such fool tricks an' I'll damage you. I always could lick yuh, an' I still can, you bet. Whatcha wanna know the time for? You ain't gotta work today."

"I got a engagement, an' you can't lick me an' never could an——"

"Nemmine about that. What's yore engagement? What kind o' devilment are y'up to now?"

"You know as well as I do. I told Spunk Lenn he'd have to be out o' town this mornin', an' I forgot whether I gave him till four, five or six; so I'm gonna play safe an' say it's four. Clock says three forty-eight, so I'll just be pullin' on my boots an' leavin' yuh. Yuh might's well have breakfast ready for me when I get back."

"Who was yore last year's nigger?" demanded Tom, whose ear still tingled. "If yo're gonna go out lookin' for Lenn, I gotta go along, an' you know it. Lenn has other friends besides Pickles, Durkin an' Cox. Yo're too venturesome; likewise yo're a idjit, a plumb idjit. Gettin' up at four in the mornin' instead o' waitin' till six like a Christian an' then goin' out an' havin' yore li'l' riot. Are you figurin' on haulin' Spunk out o' bed?"

"If I gotta," replied Red, busy with his boots. "But you needn't put yoreself to no trouble, Tom," he continued sarcastically. "I wouldn't want yuh to bother about me for a whole lot. I ain't no child an' I don't need no guardeen."

"What you need is a nurse," was the sharp return. "Shut up now; I guess you got nothin' to do with it. If I wanna get in this, I guess I got a right to. I was in it yesterday, an' you didn't have no objections. Now yuh wanna glom all the fun yoreself. We'll see about that, we will. Where's my belt? I'll bet you moved it or somethin'. Why can'tcha leave things alone? My —— Oh, here she is."

"Shore, right where yuh hung it, on the back o' the chair. Y'old sputter-box, if yuh didn't have somethin' to squall round about, yuh wouldn't be happy. Whadda yuh do when I ain't here?"

Tom countered in kind, and they left the shack still engaged in heated argument.

IT WAS a minute past the hour and broad in the light of the coming day that Red Kane rapped on the door of the one-room log-house behind the dance-hall where Spunk Lenn lived with a man named Murphy, or did live rather, for the man named Murphy, on getting out of bed and coming to the door, informed them with much bitterness that Spunk Lenn had departed at midnight.

"He pulled his freight owin' me money," complained the ex-roommate. "Twenty-eight dollars six-bits he borrowed last month, an' this ain't all neither. They was a bottle o' whisky nearly half full under my bed, an' he took that. I ain't missed nothin' else so far, but I guess that ain't Spunk's fault. Likely he didn't have time to do the job complete. An' I thought he was a friend o' mine. I hope I cut his trail sometime. Runnin' off with my money an' my whisky too, the bushwhacker."

Leaving the man named Murphy to the memory of his wrongs, they returned to the shack and had breakfast. Which meal disposed of, Tom improved the shining hour by overhauling his team harness.

"Goin' south next week," said he, "an' I don't aim to have nothin' bust on the trip. Gotta get new tugs, worse luck. The harness-makers don't care what kind o' leather they use no more."

"Yeah," yawned the uninterested Red. "I wish I had somethin' to do. I don't wanna watch Piney all day. I don't feel like it."

"Go an' get the other harness-punch, then, an' help me. I'll give yuh somethin' to do."

"Naw, I don't mean work. I don't feel like workin' today. I feel a heap lazy-like. I don't feel good neither. I got a misery in my stomach. Maybe I'm gonna be sick, Tom. Be reasonable. I gotta look after my health, don't I?"

"Too bad about yuh. Shore is. You didn't have no misery when yuh hauled me

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out o' bed in the middle o' the night. No, yuh didn't. But now yo're too delicate to work. Yuh poor feller. I'm a-grievin' for yuh, I am. I'm mighty sorry I ain't got a glass case handy for yuh to crawl into an' keep out o' drafts. Maybe yuh'd better go in an' lay down. Couldn't I hold yore hand or somethin'?"

"No," said Red, his face lighting up suddenly. "I dunno as I care about yuh holdin' my paw, but whatcha say about layin' down sounds sort o' good. Maybe I'd better do it. I don't wanna be sick here on yore hands. Lordy, no."

TOM grunted with scorn as Red retreated hurriedly into the shack. Ten minutes later he peered through the window and discovered his brother shaving himself. Tom immediately dropped the back-strap he was examining and scuffled into the house.

"My razor!" he lamented. "Yo're usin' my razor, an' I just spent a solid hour day before yesterday honin' her up good for Sunday mornin'."

"I'm shore obliged to yuh," Red assured him rapidly, fending him off with the shaving-brush. "It's fine an' sharp. You done a good job."

"An' I got it to do all over again now. Whatcha wanna shave for in the middle of the week, anyhow?"

"Because I feel like it. Think I wanna run round lookin' like a porkypine alla time? Well, I don't. I ain't like you. I got respect for my pers'nal appearance, I have. You lemme alone so's I can finish up, an' I'll give yuh back yore pretty li'l' razor so's yuh can enjoy yoreself honin' her up again. Go 'way now. Go sit down, for Gawd's sake. You make me nervous hoppin' around thataway."

"I'll make you nervous," yapped the irritated Tom. "You know I don't allow nobody to use that razor. I might 'a' guessed you'd do somethin' like this if I wasn't here to watch yuh. I'll watch yuh now, you can gamble on that. I'll set right here on this table till you get through an' out, that's what I'll do. Where's my makin's? I left 'em right here on the table, I know I did. You've took 'em. Where are they?"

"I had to," explained Red, trying to keep one eye on his exasperated relative and the other on the tiny mirror. "My bag was nearly empty. But you stop bellerin', an' I'll lend yuh some when I get through."

"You'll lend me some o' my own tobacco, will yuh? That's good. That's right down generous o' you, that is. But I guess I needn't wait till after yo're done shavin', not when you've kindly left one end o' the draw-string stickin' out o' yore vest pocket an' the vest hangin' on the wall in plain sight."

Tom gave a triumphant jerk on the draw-string, pulled out the bag and tugged it open.

"Aw, ——!" he exclaimed when he had looked within.

"Yeah," Red tranquilly observed. "I thought li'l' Brighteyes would see the draw-string a-stickin' out. So I filled the bag with bits o' paper. The tobacco's in my other bag, an' that's where you won't find it in a hurry. Don't throw that water! They's a cigar in the inside pocket o' the vest. Smoke that an' be happy. There, see whatcha made me do—cut myself!"

"Serve yuh right," Tom told him, fishing for the cigar. "Bet she's all squashed. Naw, she ain't, for a wonder. Good thing for you she ain't, too, or I'd 'a' shore soused yuh good an' plenty. Oughta done it anyway. Maybe I will yet. Yeah, I know yuh'd try for to lick me, but doin' it is somethin' else again. Go'n, go'n. Twice over yore chin now, an' call it a day."

Red Kane shrugged a contemptuous shoulder and proceeded with his shaving. The operation completed to his contentment, he pulled off his shirt and hung it up.

"Whatcha peelin' yore shirt for?" asked Tom, regarding him curiously. "You ain't gonna change it, are yuh?"

"Shore, why not?" returned Red, opening a newspaper-wrapped bundle and pulling therefrom the new shirt he had purchased of Mike Flynn. "I ain't proud. I change my shirt now an' then."

"Yo're gettin' reckless an'— Is that it? Purple hoss-shoes on a gray shirt topped by yore red hair is shore a ferocious combination. A house afire wouldn't be deuce high alongside o' you. Naw, sir. You ain't gonna wear that bright green handkerchief too, are yuh? An' them cuffs? I thought yuh done said it an' the cuffs was for Tim Page an' yuh didn't wanna get 'em dirty?"

"Shore they're for Tim, just like I said,

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but I'm gonna sort o' christen 'em for him first. He won't mind."

"O' course he won't. He'll spit in yore eye an' drownd yuh, that's all he'll do. I know now what yo're gonna do. I knowed it all along, you bet. Yo're goin' out to Sweetwater Mountain this mornin'; that's where yo're goin'."

"I might happen along that way," admitted Red. "Yuh see, Tom, I got business over round Sweetwater anyhow, an' I wouldn't want for to go by an' not say 'Howdy.' Why, Tom, maybe the old gent, her father, maybe he's worse. Maybe she needs help. An' her there all alone, too. Ain't you got no heart?"

"Plenty," replied Tom, unmoved by the harrowing picture as detailed by his brother, "but I guess she'd be able to shove along without yore help, seein' she's been a-doin' it for a few years more or less. But go ahead. Run hell-bent into yore bad luck an' shake hands with it for all I care. I wouldn't stop yuh for a lot. Nawsir, not me. Fly at it, cowboy, fly at it. Only don't say I never warned yuh."

"I shore won't. How do I look with the green handkerchief?"

"Like the wrath o' Gawd. I'm tellin' yuh, Red, blindfold the hoss yo're gonna ride, or yuh'll never get the saddle on."

Red, riding out of Farewell, knew that he was disobeying orders, but he salved his conscience by telling himself that Piney was getting along all right. Of course he was. What was the use of sitting round like a bump on a log? Obviously there was no use. Quite so.

When he sighted the nester's ranch-house, he rode warily, his eyes turning from side to side. He did not expect a too hostile reception, but with a sudden lady like Miss Lorimer one could not be too careful.

No human being was visible in the vicinity. Below a smokeless chimney the kitchen door sagged open on its recently mended hinges. Beyond the spring he saw the Lorimer horses grazing.

He dismounted in front of the corral, dropped the reins over his horse's head and approached the open door.

"Hello," he called, halting at the step.

"Hello. Who's there?" It was the weak voice of Lorimer speaking from the inner room.

"It's me, Red Kane," replied the puncher, entering on the word and walking through the kitchen into the room where the wounded man lay on his springless bunk.

It was hot in the sick-room, hotter than it was outdoors, although all the windows were open wide. The bandaged nester, covered simply by a thin sheet, stared up at Red Kane with fever-bright eyes.

"I seen yuh before," he said, low-voiced, his words slurring and sliding together. "Yuh was in that store in Farewell, an' yuh was here when them fellers tried to make out I was a road-agent. I remember yuh. Si'down."

"How do you feel?" asked Red cheerily. "Wanna drink or somethin'?"

"My daughter left a pail an' dipper on that chair before she went fishin' an', o' course, clumsy-like I had to jerk it down off the chair an' it rolled under the bunk. I would be obliged for a drink. Kind o' thirsty weather, ain't it?"

"Yeah," mumbled Red, on his hands and knees and half under the bunk. "I'll have yuh forgettin' the weather in no time."

He scrambled to his feet and hurried out to the spring. He returned with a full and slopping pail, set it on the chair and dipped in the dipper. With a touch as gentle as a woman's he slipped a hand beneath the nester's head, raised it from the pillow and held the dipper to the dry lips.

Lorimer drank in great gulps. Three dippers-full were required before his thirst was quenched. After the dipper had been sunk in the pail for the fourth time he lay back on the pillow with a long sigh of relief.

"Naw, no more," he said in reply to Red's question. "Shore feels fine, that does. I dunno when I wanted a drink so bad."

Red espied a crumpled towel beside the bunk. He picked it up. It was damp.

"My daughter wet that an' put it on my head," explained Lorimer. "She said it was good for the fever, but it fell off, an' I couldn't reach it."

Red poured cold water over the towel, wrung it partially out and then laid the cool and soppy cloth across the burning forehead. The wounded man smiled haggardly.

"That's great," he muttered. "Feels almost as good outside as it does inside."

Lorimer ceased speaking and closed his eyes. Thinking that he wished to sleep,

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Red went outside for a short smoke. When he returned, Lorimer was picking at the sheet and muttering to himself. The wet cloth had slipped from his forehead and hung down over the side of the bunk. Red dampened the towel and readjusted it. Lorimer moved his head wearily from side to side. He ceased not to mutter and pick at the sheet. By and by he spoke more clearly. Here and there Red caught words, phrases, parts of sentences.

"The money," came the words, followed by a mumble. Then: " 'Course I took it m-m-m-m-m do it again m-m-m-m-m-m didn' have no right to it all m-m-m-m-m-m —— thieves m-m-m-m-m rob m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m rob my daughter m-m-m-m-Dot m-m-n-n-n-need'n argufy m-m-m-m I know who's right. Money's mine! Mine, by ——! I tell yuh, it's mine! I took it! I tell you I had a right to! It's mine! Mine!"

Lorimer was sitting bolt upright in his bunk. He was pointing his finger at the horrified Red and screaming out his words. The puncher tried to quiet him, to push him down on the pillow. But the nester fought him off and, shrieking, raved on about his rights and his money.

Red, devoutly thankful that no one was within earshot, did not give up striving to calm the nester. He might as well have poured oil on a fire. Lorimer roared and bellowed and beat the sides of the bunk with his fists.

"Them ribs o' his must be busted over again by this time," the perspiring puncher told himself; "so I guess I just gotta be rough an' get done with it."

Taking care not to squeeze the nester's torn shoulder and side, Red, exerting all his strength, forced the nester down on the mattress and held him there. Lorimer perforce lay quietly, but he could still talk, and he did.

"I got that money!" he kept shrieking eternally. "I got that money, an' it's mine! I'd 'a' killed him, by ——, if I'd had to! But I didn't kill him! I dunno who did! They said I did! But I didn't!"

IN SPITE of the fact that Sweetwater Mountain was a lonely spot, Red's warm perspiration was succeeded by the cold sweat of apprehension. Suppose some one should ride by. Involuntarily he shivered and quite without intention glanced out of the window. What he saw in the distance was sufficiently unnerving. The thought had been father to the fact, apparently. Topping a rise two miles away was a band of horsemen. They were riding directly toward the ranch-house, and here was Lorimer yelling to high heaven what he had done in a certain affair wherein figured a sum of money. Once let the riders hear a single connected sentence and the nester would be convicted out of his own mouth. Nothing could save him.

Red clapped his hand over Lorimer's mouth and was promptly bitten. The bold Red jerked his hand away and, struck by a sudden idea, darted outside to his horse. All in a stew of haste, he unstrapped his rope and rushed back with it. Working with the speed of one engaged in contest for a prize, he tied down the delirious Lorimer in his bunk and gagged him with the wet towel. When Red was through with him Lorimer could breathe fairly well and could wiggle his toes. Otherwise he had no freedom of action whatever.

Red looked through the window. The oncoming riders had halved the distance between the rise and the ranch-house. The puncher, at gaze, heard a slight noise in his rear. He whirled about and saw that Miss Lorimer had returned.

He saw too that she was cocking a Winchester and he read a purpose in her black eyes. There was no time to temporize or parley. He sprang straight at her and dashed aside the rifle barrel.

The Winchester went off with a roar. In that confined space the sound was terrific. Half-deafened and coughing in the smoke, Red Kane wrenched the Winchester from the hands of Dot Lorimer, flung the weapon into a corner and seized the lady's hands barely in time to prevent her dragging out a skinning-knife.

She kicked and clawed like a wild thing entrapped, but he drew one of her arms behind her back in a hammer-lock, twisted her body round and, holding her other wrist, pressed his hard forearm against her throat.

"Yuh li'l' fool!" he whispered fiercely into her indignant ear, she continuing to struggle, small good though it did her. "Yuh li'l' fool! Yore pa was a-raisin' the roof at full shout till you could hear him a mile—all about some money he took an' how he'd do it again an' kill anybody tryin' to stop him! That's why I tied him down an'

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gagged him! Don'tcha see that posse comin' out yonder? How long djuh guess yore pa'd last if they heard him a-talkin' like that? I'm yore friend, I tell yuh. If you wasn't a plumb born fool, yuh'd see it. Get a-hold o' yoreself an' have sense, will yuh?"

Here he shook her with such violence that her teeth rattled. Then he sat her down with great force on a chair.

"Do yuh understand?" he asked, shaking her again.

She stared up at him, her dark eyes bright with rage. The hoof-patter swelled to a thuttering drum. The horsemen were very near. The rage in her eyes died. She gazed anxiously through the window.

"I understand," she whispered. "I— Oh, they're almost here."

Red Kane loosed his hold upon her at once, ran into the kitchen and, halting in the doorway, fell into an easy, hipshot, quite-at-home posture. He folded his arms, caressed his chin with steady fingers, and regarded the newcomers calmly.

"Lanpher an' the 88," he muttered, "an' lookin' a heap earnest, too."

The bunched outfit split like a bursting shell in front of the ranch-house. While some rode to secure the sides and rear of the building, the others, Lanpher in the van, deployed and halted in front of the doorway blocked by Red Kane's lanky-limbed frame.

The drink had not died in Lanpher, not yet. When it did, he would go to pieces and see things where nothing was. But now he was brave as several lions. He gazed upon Red Kane with a filmy, bloodshot eye. A sneer lifted his upper lip till the white teeth showed beneath. The expressions of the men at his back were heavily determined. Red smiled slowly.

"Howdy, boys," was his greeting. "What brings all yore happy Sunday faces so far from home? An' yore manager, too. Ain'tcha afraid the ranch will run away while yo're gone, Lanpher?"

"Where's that nester?" demanded Lanpher.

Red Kane's cheerful grin leaped to meet the other's ominous grimness. He leaned comfortably against the door jamb and pushed back his hat.

"The nester?" he queried in a lazy drawl. "Oh, yeah, shore, the nester. You mean Mr. Lorimer. It's shore good o' yuh to come all this way to see him. He'll appreciate it—when I tell him."

"Yuh needn't bother," said Lanpher. "We'll tell him. We want this nester for rustlin' that money out o' the express box, and we're gonna have him. You slide out o' that doorway. I'm gonna go in that house, an' you nor no other —— man is gonna stop me."

Lanpher dismounted and started toward the door. Rod Rockwell, Slim Mack and a puncher named Moresby followed their manager's example. Tom Dowling remained in the saddle. Red Kane was a friend of his, and Tom knew that Red was careless of consequences when crossed. Let Lanpher do the crossing. Besides, Tom Dowling was beginning to have doubts concerning the nester's guilt. Lanpher insisted that he had the necessary proof, but of honest-to-God specific evidence he had not mentioned a single detailed shred. Tom Dowling sagged back against his cantle and folded his hands on top of his saddle-horn.

As Lanpher and his three men approached the door Red Kane did not move. In his heart Red expected to die violently within two minutes. To be precise, he allowed himself some sixty seconds of life. He was one man and the 88 numbered a full score. The present moment was far different from that other when Carlson and the crowd from Farewell had arrived with intent to lynch. Then Kansas Casey had been on the ground. Kansas was a hard and willing fighter. And behind Kansas loomed the majesty of the Law. Ostensibly it had been the girl and what she said at the critical split second that had fended off disaster, but in reality it had been Kansas and his star. Legend to the contrary notwithstanding, men do not relish killing a deputy sheriff. It spells trouble in letters of the largest size.

Yet no hint of Red's grisly expectations appeared in his expression. He continued to smile pleasantly and look at Lanpher with serene, half-closed eyes. Tom Dowling, observant person that he was, perceived that Red, while he still stood with folded arms, had slightly shifted the position of those arms. Red's left hand was partly hidden by an outstanding fold of his right sleeve. Tom was glad that he had chosen to play a waiting part.

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"Not another step!" suddenly rapped out Red, flicking up his left hand.

Lanpher and his three adherents stared into the twin barrels of Red's derringer. But Lanpher was beyond being daunted by even a .50 caliber firearm. A spasm contorted his features and his right hand flashed downward.

Red Kane immediately shot him through the neck and right arm and, firing through the bottom of his holster, distributed five bullets among Slim Mack, Rod Rockwell and Moresby. But these three had been hardly slower than Red in getting into action.

RED KANE, hit in three places, felt as if a veil of black mist were descending upon him. He put up a hand to brush away the mist. But the mist was very thick and sticky and in the distance red lightnings flashed and thunder rolled. It was very curious. The sky had been clear a moment ago. How odd that there should be a thunder-storm. He mustn't get his new shirt or Tim Page's handkerchief wet. The colors might run. He should have brought his brother's slicker.

And now a high wind began to blow and the dark mist swirled and whirled in seething eddies above the face of great waters—great gray waters that stretched away and away as the mist lifted to a dim and curiously engrailed horizon. The mist cleared off completely, and the strange horizon slid nearer, and the points of the engrailing became trees, the chestnut-leaved white-oak of the South.

The waters turned from gray to blue, a blue shot with sparkles that came and went in the play of the sunshine on the ripples.

Hear that regular thump and beat of mighty paddles. The *Star of the West* was coming round a bend. There were her tall twin stacks, with billowing smoke a-trailing, lifting over the tree-tops. See the white feather of steam from her whistle. But you wouldn't hear the deep bellow for several seconds after the steam vanished. Hear it now. Sounds like a bull with a sore throat, doesn't it? The *General Johnstone* was the only other steamer on the river that had a deeper, louder whistle than the *Star of the West*. But then the former was a New Orleans packet, while the *Star of the West* hailed from Natchez-under-the-Hill.

There was a series of creaks and small crashes at Red's back. He turned his head. A large and energetic razorback was rooting his way beneath the palings enclosing Maje Throstlewit's yard. As he looked, the lean hog squinched through and, a wisp of straw caught in a ragged ear, rushed grunting into Maje's patch of corn. From the house issued Maje's wife brandishing a broom. At her heels ran Maje, corncob short held between his teeth and sticking right under his nose the way it always did. Some day, if Maje wasn't careful, he'd swallow the stem.

Red laughed to see the pair chase the hog between the cornstalks. Maje was calling the hog names. His wife was panting. Now and then one of the two would manage to whack the pig, and the razorback, amid a flurry of squeals, would tear off at a tangent.

Maje Throstlewit and his wife! It was years since he had seen them. Odd, too, that he should see them, for he had heard that both had lost their lives when the *Modoc's* boilers burst during a race with the *War Eagle*.

The *Star of the West* was steaming in on a long slant. She was swinging her gangplank. She was coming in. Hear the bells and the mate bawling at the roustabouts. Pretty extra good mate. It was told of him that he could swear steadily at a fair rate of speed for twelve minutes without repeating himself once. But this was mere hearsay. Red didn't know whether to believe it or not.

Hello, there was his brother coming down to the landing. He was barefooted, and one suspender secured with two horseshoe nails held up his ragged pants. Red glanced down at his own trousers and discovered they were even more ragged than Tom's. He too was barelegged, and one of his big toes wore a dirty bandage made fast with coarse cotton thread.

Tom sat down at his side, and together they watched the steamer make the landing and the passengers come ashore. There was whiskered Col. Weeks with his fat stomach and bunch of heavy seals hanging from a fob. He had a handsome daughter, Miss Josephine. Yes, there she was, poke bonnet and all, holding a tiny parasol over her head. Waiting to welcome her father,

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the pretty dear. And Brother Jonathan Simms, the local evangelist, with his high hat and burning eyes. Brother Jonathan turned his peculiar, smoldering gaze full upon Red. The eyes grew larger and larger, glowing a brighter and brighter yellow, till, of a sudden, Red saw that they were not the evangelist's eyes but the two lamplit kitchen windows of his own home. He was walking toward them through the warm Arkansas dusk. The hellydids and the crickets were busy about their affairs in the wood behind the house, and the frogs were saying "jug o' rum" as hard as they could croak.

He went into the kitchen and found that his mother had saved supper for him as usual. She never failed him—in anything. There was an extra piece of pie, too. My, how good the corn-pone was. Mother's corn-pone never tasted gritty as some folks' did. The cold fried chicken was just about right. He gnawed a luscious drumstick fife-fashion and squared his hard young elbows on the table.

He laid down the drumstick and grinned to think what Tom had missed. Where was Tom anyway? He looked out of the window and saw, instead of Tom, the midsummer moon high above the black wedge of the Baptist Church spire.

How distinctly he could see the face of the Man in the Moon. The Man was laughing and winking a great and kindly eye. Subtly the features altered. How much they resembled the features of his friend Tom Dowling, who rode for the 88 ranch. The Man in the Moon stopped winking, and Red saw that he was quite close, in the room, in fact. Why, it wasn't the Man in the Moon at all. It was Tom Dowling. He wasn't two feet away. Red could touch him if he wanted to. He tried to lift an arm. But the arm wouldn't lift. What was the matter with his arms? He couldn't move either of them. He wanted to cry. He had to close his eyes hard and hold them shut tightly for a long minute in order to keep back the tears. When he opened them again the face of Tom Dowling had disappeared and the face of Dot Lorimer had taken its place. There was not much snap in the black eyes now. They were soft and tired-looking and very, very tender. A sense of delicious peace pervaded Red's whole being.

"This is shore heaven at last," he muttered low, so low that she had to bend her head to catch the words. "This is shore heaven, an' yo're one of the angels."

CHAPTER XIV

THE STRANGER

FOLLOWED a period of seven days during which Red lay waking little and sleeping much, days through which flitted shadow glimpses of Dot Lorimer and Tom Dowling. At times he would be given queer-tasting liquids to drink. At times his head was bathed in cool water.

On the morning of the eighth day Red opened his eyes on a bright, sharply defined world. Directly above him were the heavy logs of a ranch-house roof. He turned his head sidewise and saw that he was in a bunk set against one end of a small room. At the other end of the room was an open doorway, through which he glimpsed the vista of a much larger room opening into the kitchen. He knew it was the kitchen. He could see the stove. But the view through the doorway interested him not at all. For, beside the doorway of his room, beneath a window, was a heavy home-made table, and at the table, one hand clutching a piece of bread, the other holding a tin cup, sat Dot Lorimer.

Manifestly sleep had overtaken the lady. Her body swayed gently forward and back. Her head was nodding. In through the window streamed the sunbeams and turned the dark hair into a helmet of black and shining metal. It speaks well for Dot Lorimer's good looks that, despite the food, despite the tin cup, despite the head-nodding, she was definitely handsome. Red sighed.

At the slight sound the girl awoke with a start, dropped bread and cup and crossed quickly to the bed.

"How do you feel now?" she asked, laying one hand on his forehead.

"Out o' sight," he replied, mustering up a smile.

"You ought to," she said, smiling in return. "Your fever's all gone, although you never had a great deal. I kept it down with hickory ash and water as well as I could. Guess you've slept enough; so I shan't give you any more henbane. What you need now is a tonic. I wish I had some white-wood bark, but I haven't

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a bit; I'll have to do the best I can with swamp dogwood. Lie quiet now while I'm in the kitchen. After a while I'll look at your wounds and dress them."

"Lordy!" murmured Red, his eyes following her retreating figure with respect and admiration. "Hickory ash, henbane, swamp dogwood. Reg'lar doctor, she is."

Came in Tom Dowling from the kitchen and sat down beside the bed.

" 'Lo, old-timer," grinned Tom, who had dark crescents beneath his eyes and fine lines of weariness at the corners of his mouth. "How you feelum?"

"Like I could dance," said Red. "Whatsa matter with me? I don't seem to hurt much anywhere, considerin'."

"Yo're only shot in four places. Outside o' that they's nothin' the matter with you. But don'tcha worry none. All them bullets sifted through. Every one of 'em's in the kitchen wall right now."

"Seems like I do remember a fracas," admitted Red, wrinkling his forehead.

"Yo're improvin'," Tom said dryly. "They was a short riot. You had a argument with Lanpher, Slim Mack, Rockwell and Moresby. You drilled Lanpher twice, an' I did hear how he ain't expected to live, but I guess that ain't true—he's too mean to die, that feller. You put three holes in Slim Mack, busted one of his ribs an' a arm in two places. Yessir," the bloodthirsty Mr. Dowling continued with relish, "Slim Mack's almost as bad as Lanpher. Rockwell an' Moresby got off easy. Rod only lost the upper half of one ear an' Moresby went shy his right thumb. Tough on Moresby, sort o'. He never could shoot left-handed, an', if he can't learn, he'll be plumb afoot with a six-gun."

"Where did I get it?" Red queried impatiently.

"Both arms, one leg, an' yore shoulder. The lead cut an artery in yore leg, too. She had quite a time with that, Miss Lorimer did, but she made out to sew it up with a harness needle an' thread."

"Yeah? An' I never knowed it? Yo're crazy."

"I ain't crazy, but you was out o' yore head alla time. You was delirious an' senseless an' ravin' an' Gawd knows what all for twelve days."

"Twelve days!"

"Twelve whole days from the time you was plugged till yuh got sensible again, an' I dunno as yuh was so sensible at that."

"Twelve days since I was shot," marveled Red.

"Nineteen," corrected Tom Dowling. "She's seven full days since yuh stopped ravin' an' bein' senseless. Add twelve an' seven an' yuh get nineteen."

But Red's brain was not equal to problems in addition. Besides, another question kept bobbing up and down in his mind.

"Where was the rest o' yore outfit alla time?" he asked. "Why didn't they chime in an'—an'— What are you doin' here, anyhow?" Then, before Tom could make reply, a wave of remembrance came to Red, and he cried sharply: "Did they—was he—did they get him?"

"Him? Who? Oh, you mean Ben Lorimer. Naw, they didn't get him. They—they decided not to."

"They did? What decided 'em?"

"Damfino. How's that sheet feel, Red? Kind o' ruffled under the ol' chin. I'll fix her. There, that's all right now, huh?"

"Why don't you tell him who stopped them?" inquired from the doorway the quiet voice of Miss Lorimer. "He stopped them, Mr. Kane. They'd have killed you where you lay and undoubtedly would have hung my father if Mr. Dowling hadn't jumped from his horse and persuaded them not to."

"Shucks," muttered Mr. Dowling. "Guess I better go after some water."

He rose and fled past Miss Lorimer to the kitchen and the outer air.

"Of course he's modest about it," went on Miss Lorimer. "He would be. He's that kind. But I turn cold all over whenever I think what surely would have happened if he hadn't been here. He swore to shoot the first man that pulled a gun, and I guess they believed him. And he's been here ever since helpin' me."

"Tom's a right good feller," Red told her warmly, "an'— What?"

She had moved close to the bunk and was looking down at him. The fingers of her capable hands were twisting together nervously.

"You—you dud-did more than any one," she stammered. "I—I can't thank you. Words don't count somehow."

It was Red's turn to be uncomfortable.

"I didn't do nothin'," he said, his face and neck prickling hotly.

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"You fought for—for us," she continued unsteadily, "when you had no reason to—when you had every reason not to. And—and I thought you were a spy when I saw my father bound and gagged, and I was goin' to shoot you. Oh, you're just wonderful."

The warm prickling invaded his spinal column.

"Tha's all right," was all he could say. "Tha's all right."

"I wish I could make it up to you. I can't bear to see you sufferin' that way for—for us."

"Lordy, ma'am, I ain't sufferin'. Which I should say not. Sufferin', huh! Ain't you a-takin' care o' me? An' after me handlin' you so rough that time. I shore had to do it, ma'am. It was the only wagon-track out. But I didn't aim to be a bother to yuh like I am now, an' you with yore father sick an' all. How is he feelin' now?"

"He's all right. His rib couldn't have knitted better. The day you were shot was his last bad time. He's been improvin' ever since. He'll be in to see you later on. I make him sit out by the spring in the shade as much as possible. He's there now. While the dogwood bark's boilin', I guess I'll just dress your wounds. And don't you worry about being a bother. Bother indeed!"

In a very workmanlike fashion she took off the bandages, cleansed the wounds, and applied a substance resembling blue sand. This, she informed him, was a mixture of wild indigo root and common brown sugar pounded to powder.

"I was afraid of infection," was her explanation.

It is not to be supposed that he heard her. For embarrassment was consuming him. It was false embarrassment to be sure. But it was for all that a most unpleasant sensation.

"I'm sorry it hurts so," she said, remarking the perspiration on his forehead. "I'm almost through."

As a matter of fact, the pain of the dressing was easily endurable. But he could not have told her so to save his life. He was long past speech. She finished rebandaging, settled his head on the pillow to his liking and hers and smiled widely.

"You'll do till tomorrow," said she and withdrew to the kitchen.

He could hear a pan cover clink now and then. He could hear her humming to herself. It was a sprightly catch and a merry. She began to whistle the air. It went even better. He wondered what the name might be. When she came in with the dogwood infusion, he asked her.

"Like the tune?" said she, setting the cup on the table. "So do I. It's called 'Chelsea Reach,' and it's old as Job's turkey, but there's somethin' about it that sets the blood to spinnin' and the heart to beatin' faster. I'll sing you a song if you like."

He said he would. So, standing against the wall, without a trace of marring shyness, she gave him "John Peel" in an alto as clear as a bell.

"That's shore a real song," he said, when she had sung it through. "Liked to get up early in the mornin', didn't he, that feller? The last verse is sort o' sad-like. Sound's if Mr. Peel was dead. Is he?"

"I'm afraid he is."

"That's tough. I'll bet I'd 'a' enjoyed knowin' Mr. Peel. I had a dog named Bellman myself once back east in Arkansas. But he fit a bear one time, an' I had to bury him. I wonder, ma'am, could I have a smoke?"

"I don't believe it would hurt you. I'll roll you one."

She went into the next room for tobacco and a paper. While she was gone Red saw a man ride past the window. The horse was the long-legged gray with the corn coming in his near forehoof and the man was the wide-shouldered stranger with the wide, unsmiling mouth. The horseman did not stop at the house. Doubtless he was going to the spring.

The *pad-pad* of the horse's feet ceased abruptly. Arose then the murmur of voices. The stranger was talking to Lorimer. Red could not distinguish more than a word here and there. He did not try to eavesdrop. But there was no harm in listening, especially when he could do no otherwise.

Miss Lorimer returned slowly, her supple fingers busy with the fashioning of the cigaret. She raised it to her mouth, gave it a swift lick down along with the tip of a pink tongue, twisted one end and stuck the other between Red's lips.

"Company for dinner," she told him, giving him a light from a spill she brought in from the kitchen.

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"Who is he?" he inquired between puffs.

"He?" She cocked her eyebrows at him, pinching out the spill between finger and thumb. "Oh, you saw him through the window, didn't you? He rode up that side. Lord knows who he is; I don't. Some stranger. Here comes another. No, it isn't either. Why, it's the relative you brought with you the first time you came—your brother. When you were lookin' for rustled horses. Remember?"

His face reddened at the recollection and she laughed at him over her shoulder as she went out into the kitchen. Tom Kane had dismounted at the door. A moment later the girl ushered him into the sick room and, departing, closed the door behind her.

TOM let himself down carefully into a chair and grinned at his brother. Tom looked slightly the worse for wear. A bandage gray with dust encircled his head and it was obvious that he had not shaved for many days. Yet his grin was full of cheer.

"How're they comin'?" he demanded.

"In bunches," replied Red. "You look like you'd met up with a bunch yoreself. What happened?"

"Nothin' much." Tom scraped the floor with the toe of his boot and looked guilty.

"Who you been fightin' with?"

"Well, I guess I got a right to as well as you. Hell's bells, Red, why didn'tcha tell a feller yuh was gonna go up against that 88 bunch? You poor —— fool, you ain't fit to be trusted out o' my sight. What do you think you are—a army?"

"How could I tell what I was runnin' into?" defended Red. "I didn't know nothin' about it till it happened."

"An' yuh didn't know nothin' much afterward, Tom Dowling told me when he rid in to Farewell a couple o' days after the fracas. That was the first I'd heard of it an' I'd 'a' come right out here instanter, only I wanted to sort o' settle up with the 88 first. Tom said you was in good hands an' he was gonna flock round with yuh an' sort o' lookout yore game for a spell; so I let it go at that an' sashayed out myself after the 88.

"Naturally I had to be careful. They's only one o' me an' a-plenty o' them. But I cut the trail o' two of 'em a week later over near Soogan Creek. I ventilated that freckle-faced Bill Allen through the leg an' downed both their hosses. I was tryin' for a shot at Tile Stanton when that crazy 'Lonzo Peters an' Dan Gildersleeve come whoopin' along an' I had to drag it sharp an' soon. They chased me, o' course, but I worked a Injun trick on 'em comin' through the cottonwoods along the Lazy, an' 'Lonzo bit an' I nicked him. Plumb through the shoulder, I heard later. That made two, an' the work half done.

"Four days later me an' Bert Kinzie had a party on Packsaddle. Bert burnt the side o' my head a li'l' bit an' I put a hole in his hand an' drilled his arm. This made three. Yuh see, I didn't wanna down nobody. They didn't down you an' I was only out to play even for the holes in yuh—one gent nicked for every hole. What could be fairer than that? But o' course they didn't know I wasn't really serious, an' you better believe they tried to beef me proper. They played cautious, too. Kept a-ridin' round in pairs. I had to walk in the water a lot, you bet.

"But I wasn't in no hurry. I had all the time there is, an' final, yesterday afternoon, I met Dan Gildersleeve slidin' right down Main Street like he owned the town. He seen me first, but his shot missed an' mine didn't. Dan got his jaw an' cheek tore up some, he lost a few teeth, an' he busted his arm. But I didn't have nothin' to do with the arm. He done that himself when he fell off his pony.

"Jake Rule—yeah, the sheriff's back at last—Jake, he got kind o' fussy an' said I'd been a-huntin' trouble all along an' how I'd oughta keep my feuds for out o' town. My feuds! An' Dan shootin' at me first! Well, I told Jake what I thought about it an' he pulled in his horns. Alla same, I don't guess I'll vote for Jake next election. He's got too much to say for a sheriff."

Tom leaned back in his chair and nodded at Red with keen satisfaction.

"Yo're paid for, old settler," said Tom. "Next time I'll bet them 88 jiggers will look ahead a ways. Yes, sir, I'll gamble they will."

"Yuh idjit," murmured Red affectionately. "You never will learn sense. Bawlin' at me for wrastlin' with a whole outfit when it's plumb necessary, an' then you hop out an' do the same thing when it ain't. Don't talk to me, yuh catfish. Seen Old Salt? Guess I lost my job with the Bar S all right."

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"I did an' you have, but whadda you care? Come in the freightin' business with me. Beats punchin' cows a mile. Yo're y'own boss. They ain't no dog with a brass collar to tell yuh what to do, an' they's money in it—real, shore-'nough money. Nemmine decidin' now. We'll talk about it when yuh get well.

"Man, I hadda laugh at Old Salt. He was mad enough to chew nails when he rode in to find out why yuh hadn't reported an' heard what had happened. Yuh know how his ol' mustache jigs up an' down when he's riled. Well, sir, that set o' whiskers shore kissed his eyebrows in four places. 'This is a ——uva note!' he shouts. 'My best puncher laid up!' Yeah, he called yuh that without thinkin'. 'An' a range war started to boot! —— them nesters to ——! How'n Gawd's name can a man make money with such goin's-on? An' business was just a-hellin'! Couldn't 'a' been better! Red's fired! He can't never whirl a rope for the Bar S again!' He was shore turned upside-down, Old Salt was, an' he had three drinks one after another in the Happy Heart all by himself. Didn't even treat the barkeep."

"A range war!" repeated Red, his gray eyes very serious. "I wonder does he really mean that."

"Guess so," said cheerful Tom. "Them 88 sports are mad clear through. Naturally, you bein' Bar S, they won't feel like huggin' yore side-whiskers when they meet. Lively times, old settler, lively times. But, come to think of it, the 88 can't do such a lot. They ain't many of 'em left to do it. First an' last you'n' me have laid quite a jag o' them boys on the shelf—seven gents an' the manager. Naw, sir, they'll be too short-handed for a spell to do more than squall. Old Salt's a fool—bellerin' before he's throwed."

"I didn't go for to start no range war," grieved Red, thinking of his former comrades of the Bar S. "I wouldn't want none of 'em to shuffle off on my account."

"They won't mind that none," declared Tom. "They know you'd do the same for them any time. Don't let that worry yuh a minute, Red. We're all with yuh, y' betcha, an' glad o' the chance. Tom Dowling said himself it was about time somebody put a crimp in Lanpher. D' he quit? Shore he quit. Said he wouldn't work for no such outfit nohow. Guess he'll ride for the Cross-in-a-box. Jack Richie said he'd give him a job any time. Huh? The jigger on the gray hoss? I didn't come out with him. He was ahead o' me."

"Has he been in Farewell alla time?" asked Red.

"Stayed a week, thassall. Name's Hollister. I heard him askin' for mail one day."

"D' he get any?"

"Not that day." Tom glanced over his shoulder to make sure the door was closed. "Say," he went on, lowering his voice slightly, "you ain't asked her yet, have yuh?"

"Not yet, but when I'm able to sit up I'm gonna do it too quick. Goin' in business with you, Tommy darlin', is gonna make it a heap easier to support a wife. You dunno how obliged I am to yuh, Tom. I'll try to make it up to yuh some day."

Tommy darling stared blankly at his brother.

"I never thought o' that," he said after a space. "I—yo're still set on marryin' the lady?"

"You bet." For a wounded man, the declaration was delivered with convincing snap.

"Well," said Tom, after another brow-wrinkling interval, "she's yore private uneral. An' I guess it won't hurt yore business value none."

When Tom had gone out to unsaddle—for he was staying to dinner—Red's mind reverted uncomfortably to the fact that Dowling had given Lorimer the proper name of Ben. Red began to invent specious reasons why there could not possibly be any connection between the nester and the knife. Began—and gave it up.

CHAPTER XV

RECOVERY

OF COURSE there was no reason why the unsmiling Mr. Hollister should intrigue Red Kane. But he did intrigue him from the moment that Red, looking through the intervening doorways, saw him take a chair at the Lorimer dinner table.

There was nothing unusual about Hollister. He might have been a puncher, a nester or a cattle-buyer. Whatever his trade or profession, he was indubitably

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an outdoor man. The deep tan of many Summers under the sun bore testimony to that. Minus his hat, Hollister displayed a close-cut head of yellow hair.

During the meal Hollister said no word. He champed and chewed unceasingly except when the spirit moved him to drink. In both eating and drinking he was a mighty trencherman before the Lord. He had three heaping helpings of everything besides nine biscuits and seven cups of coffee. Red knew. He kept count. In a land where men ate rather more than less, Hollister's appetite was remarkable. Red wondered where he found room to stow it all. For Hollister was not in the least fat. As has been said, his body was slim. No woman of fair size need have been ashamed to possess a waist the size of Hollister's.

Immediately following the meal Hollister took horse and departed eastward, Red was told by Miss Lorimer when she brought him in a most nourishing drink concocted of raw eggs, condensed milk and water.

"I didn't hear any hens a-cacklin'," said Red, when she had wiped his mouth.

"Bless you, we haven't a chicken on the place. Your brother brought them with him from Farewell. Wasn't it thoughtful of him?"

Red agreed that it was. Tom, it appeared, was still in a state of thoughtfulness. He was sitting on a rock beyond the spring, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands.

"When I asked him if he had cramps," said the direct Miss Lorimer, "and couldn't I give him a drink of whisky, he said, no, he was just restin'. Funny way to rest, sittin' down on a hard rock. Easy now, while I slide my hand under your head. I want to plump up your pillow for you. Are you sure your brother's all right? Maybe that graze is deeper than it seems."

"They's nothin' the matter with Tom," Red assured her. "He's only got somethin' on his mind, an' he's a-workin' it out. That's the way he always does when he thinks—sits on somethin' hard an' wrastles his head with both hands."

When Miss Lorimer went back to the kitchen Red puzzled his brain as to what Tom could be thinking about. He knew it was not the feud with the 88. Tom was not the man to brood on or worry over that. What, then, was he thinking about?

Red, puzzling his brain on the subject, presently dozed off. He slept the long warm afternoon away and awoke in the dusk of the evening. A shaded lamp stood on the table. In the chair sat Tom Dowling. He was making cigarets. There was a pile of them beside the lamp. Dowling looked up at the slight sound of Red's stirring.

"Miss Lorimer says yuh can smoke all yuh want," said Dowling, getting up and coming to the bunk. "I had a lot made this afternoon but Tom he glommed the bunch an' I never found it out till after he'd gone. Yeah, he's went. Told me to tell yuh he'd be out again soon's he could. Here's a smoke for baby. Open the li'l' mouthy, that's a good girl. Drag at it now with the li'l' ol' bellows. Thassa boy. Where's she at? Gone huntin' some kind o' Injun yarb for yore scratches an' another brand o' bark to bile up for yuh to drink. Say, what she dunno about doctorin' you could write on yore finger-nail, an' yore littlest one at that.

"Gawd knows where she found that wild indigo an' dogwood. They ain't none growin' round here I ever heard tell of. She's a six-ply wonder, that lady. Why, Red, one time you wouldn't believe how you was carryin' on—yellin' an' hollerin' all about a Maje Throstlewit gent an' a razor-back hawg an' the *Queen o' the West* an' corn-pone an' fried chicken till yuh made my mouth water just to listen to yuh—you was carryin' on an' bouncin' round an' I was gonna tie yuh down before yuh busted them bullet holes open. But Miss Lorimer wouldn't have nothin' like that. Not her. She takes some o' this yarb an' a pinch o' that bark an' wood ashes—ordinary wood ashes—an' biles it up an' cools it off an' throws that into yuh. An' you don't holler more'n three minutes after. Naw, sir, Red, you start a-millin' right then, an' pretty quick yo're all bedded down quiet an' asleep.

"If I knowed as much thataway as she does I'd be all swelled up like a poisoned pup. But not her; she just acts like she don't know nothin'. I tell yuh, she can walk all over me any time an' I'll enjoy it. An' that's the kind o' hairpin I am."

Red's eyebrows drew together. Of course Miss Lorimer was all that Tom Dowling said she was. But it wasn't in

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the least necessary for Tom to praise her to Red. It was none of Tom's business. What did the poor fool mean anyway? Why couldn't he shut up?

Which was ungrateful of Red and unjust to Tom Dowling. But Red was a sick man, and the sick are by their very nature prone to magnify trifles. Was it possible that Tom was falling in love with Miss Lorimer? Indeed it was more than possible. Why not? It would be strange if that which Red considered beautiful did not find favor in the eyes of other men. And Tom Dowling had eyes. Oh, most certainly he had eyes.

Red lay wretched and jealous while Tom Dowling talked on, and cursed the luck that held him lapped in bandages. What chance had a bedridden invalid against a man who was up and about? To make love with any likelihood of succeeding one must have the use of one's arms—of one hand at the least. And Red could barely wiggle his fingers. The handicap was overwhelming.

Under the circumstances it is no wonder that when Miss Lorimer returned from her herb-gathering she found Red Kane in a high fever. She sent Tom Dowling packing, insisting in the face of his strong denial that he had in some manner unknown to her excited her patient.

"I don't care," she said as she shooed him into the kitchen. "I don't mind your talkin' to him. There's no harm in that, but he mustn't be got all hot and worked up. I won't have it and I don't want to hear any excuses, either. The idea! I leave him cool and restin' easy, and I come back and find him restless as a cat and soaked with perspiration. You're a fine person to leave in charge. A fi-ine person, I must say. Don't you go in there again without my permission. That's for you too, dad! What? No, I don't care if you haven't been in yet. You can't see him now. Tomorrow mornin', perhaps."

"Y'act as if we was kids!" her father cried indignantly.

"That's all you are," she shot back. "That's all any man is—just a big overgrown kid, and the quicker you realize that important fact the better."

"'Fact—important,'" he repeated. "Quit that there book-talkin', Dot. I don't like it."

"You be satisfied if I drop my g's."

"Who's boss round here?" demanded Lorimer, his black eyes twinkling.

"I'm boss, and don't you forget it for a minute."

"I guess yo're right at that," he admitted with a rueful grin.

"You bet I'm right. Here! Don't lean sidewise. Bend forward when you want to pick anythin' off the floor. You won't be able to fool with that rib for a week yet. Boss! I should say so! If you didn't have one I don't know what would become of you."

"Now see whatcha done, Dot, talkin' hard thataway," remonstrated her father. "You've scared Dowling so he's gone out to the corral. He thinks you mean all them words. He dunno how real skimmerin' gentle you are inside."

"Oh, I'm gentle am I? Shows how much you know about me. Sit down, Pa, do, till I get the table set."

A capable person, Dot Lorimer, as any one may see.

RED KANE listened to her talk and smiled gently to himself. There was a girl for you! I should say so. No nonsense about her. Not a bit. She'd look after a man. Gentle? Of course she was. You could tell that with half an eye. Tom Kane was a fool. The more he thought about it the more he realized how much of a fool Tom Kane was.

"I'll have the laugh on Tom yet," Red told himself. "Yes, sir, I'll shore make Tom eat his words without salt."

Tom Dowling, however, remained a large fly in Red's mustard. For Dowling, if he had been scared out to the corral as reported by Lorimer, had gotten bravely over his fright. He was much in the girl's company. Frequently Red heard them laughing together. To Red these sounds of merriment were as the chuckling of fiends in the Pit. Had he been able, he would have writhed. But what he did not do physically he did mentally till his teeth chattered.

But always these periods of torture and bitter depression would be dispelled by the lady herself, who would bring Red a cool drink and plump up his pillow and cheer him with old songs that, through her, he had learned to love. And they would talk together of many things, the little common things of which are built the lives and loves

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and hopes of this our world. She told him stories, too—stories of men and women dead and dust these many hundred years.

Of all these tales he liked the best the ones that dealt with *Robin Hood*, an outlawed bowman who did a thriving trade in pardoners' purses. *Merry Robin* was a favorite with Miss Lorimer, it appeared, and she took pains to make the archer fairly live for her listener.

"So you see," she said one day at the end of the story wherein *Robin* shoots against the foresters and kills a man, "he was not really wicked. He had no desire to leave his home, his people, and become an outlaw in the greenwood. But he had no choice, don't you see. He was forced—forced by circumstances. And," she went on, her eyes cast down upon her sewing, "I think that's the way it is in real life sometimes. A man doesn't mean to do wrong, but, with the best intentions in the world, he does do wrong. Then again, there are times when a man without having done a thing out of the way is absolutely compelled to become an outlaw. A man must fight fire with fire. Bother! I've snapped my thread again." She knotted the thread and raised her eyes to his a fleeting instant. "You believe that, don't you, about fighting fire with fire?"

"Y'betcha," he told her fervently.

In his then state he would have believed anything she wanted him to believe. After all, why not? What sort of man is he who can not see eye to eye with his heart's desire? He is not in love, be sure of that.

"Ma'am," he said suddenly, "is that Tom Dowling round?"

"No, he's out back of the corral with Dad. Why?"

"Will you marry me?"

She leaned back in her chair and looked at him steadily. A tiny smile lurked at one corner of her mouth, a dimple at the other.

"I—I—" she began, and stopped, her upper lip caught between her teeth.

"I don't mean now this minute," he cut in hastily. "When I get well."

"I'm afraid you're a little feverish," she said and stretched out a hand and laid it on his forehead.

"I ain't feverish," he exclaimed with impatience. "Will you?"

The lurking smile became a laugh. She crossed her knees, clasped her hands and swung one foot.

"Are you very sure you know what love means?"

"Shore I am. Why wouldn't I?"

"I'm not so sure you do. They say a man always falls in love with his nurse."

"Who says so?" he demanded in wrath.

"Everybody. But it doesn't matter. What I have to be sure of is your end of it. I must be absolutely sure that you love me."

"Ain't I tellin' yuh I love yuh? What more do yuh want?"

"You may only think you're sure."

"If I could walk an' use my arms I'd quick show yuh whether I loved yuh or not. Just because I'm a-layin' here all crippled up, yuh——"

"Walkin' and usin' your arms haven't a thing to do with it, not a thing. Love is not to be lightly entered into, and——"

"I ain't enterin' it lightly. I done told yuh the second time I met yuh I was gonna marry yuh an' I'm gonna do it."

"Oh, no doubt you find me attractive. That's natural. There aren't many women in this country and a girl with passable good looks is always considered a beauty. You're young and impressionable. You meet me and tumble hard. But it doesn't mean anything. I know these love-at-a-glance affairs. They're in and out like a dipping tank. In a year you'd either have forgotten me or would want to forget me. Suppose we're married. What then? Wouldn't I be in a fine fix?"

She looked at him as severely as she was able.

"Djuh know somethin'," said he. "I believe yo're lovin' me alla time."

"What!"

"Shore. Yuh gimme too many reasons against it for 'em to be natural. Yuh don't mean a word of it, not a word. If yuh didn't care nothin' about me yuh'd 'a' said 'No' an' been done with it. Lordy, I wish I could move these here arms."

"I didn't say a word about myself," she observed calmly. "I didn't say I couldn't love you, you know. It may be that I could love you—I've always had a weakness for red hair. Yes, it's quite possible."

She nodded to him and smiled again and continued to swing her foot.

"Could you love me?" he asked, controlling his voice by an effort.

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"Oh yes, I could love you. I'm reasonably sure of that."

"Then if you could love me an' I do love you I don't see what's to stop our gettin' married."

"Now we're back where we started. 'Could' and 'do' aren't the same by a long mile. Before I marry you, or any one, I must first be sure that I am more to them—to him, I mean, or you—than a passin' fancy. You see, in this I'm thinkin' of them—him or you. As a wife I'd do my best to make my husband happy, but as a passin' fancy I'd make my husband wish he'd never been born. It's all or nothin' with me. Oh, I'm a jealous cat when I have reason, and I'd be liable to throw things. How'd you like it if I should hit you in the eye with a plate?"

"You sound like my brother," he told her seriously.

"Your brother?"

"That's the way he talks—against marriage, like. But I always tell him he dunno what he's talkin' about, the poor fool, the way I'm tellin' you now."

"You mean I'm a poor fool?" Her voice shook with mirth.

"You know well enough what I mean. I mean you'll never heave no crockery at me. 'Cause why? 'Cause you'll never have reason. Yuh can shake yore head all yo're a mind to. I know what I know an' I know what I'm gonna do when I get well. I'll make yuh see that I love yuh, an' I'll make yuh admit yuh love me right out loud an' plain. What's fairer than that?"

The lady put her head on one side and regarded him steadfastly.

"We'll see," she said presently. "We'll see."

CHAPTER XVI

THIN ICE

RED, convalescing, was sitting on the bench outside the kitchen door with Lorimer. Red's wounded leg was stretched straight out. The bullet had made a jagged wound and there was still danger of bursting it open. But Red's arms and shoulder beyond a slight twinge or stiffness now and again, were completely whole. So nearly recovered was he that Tom Dowling had gone to his waiting job at the Cross-in-a-box.

In front of the two men on the bench were lined up a-horseback the sheriff, Jake Rule, Kansas Casey, his deputy and a man named Bill Derr, half owner of a ranch south of Seymour. Mr. Derr, a person of even taller, leaner build than the nester Lorimer, was said to know more concerning the territorial criminal element than twenty sheriffs. His work had been, and at times still was, man-hunting. He was engaged to Miss Blythe, Mike Flynn's partner in the Blue Pigeon.

Now Bill Derr turned his washed-out gray eyes on the two officers of the law and laughed shortly. Kansas and Jake looked sheepish.

"I guess I gotta make allowances for you fellers," said Derr, to the enjoyment of the spectators on the bench and the listening girl in the kitchen, "but I dunno why yuh didn't write for a fuller description of this Hudson gent before draggin' me north. You'd 'a' saved us all trouble. I wouldn't mind if Mister Lorimer was John Hudson, 'cause John rustled one o' my ponies once, but when he don't even look like him it shore gives me a pain."

"The county'll pay the bill!" cried the stung sheriff.

"You bet it will," said Bill Derr, "an' I won't be none easy on it neither."

At this juncture there appeared on the top of the ridge to the west what was apparently a riderless horse. On its nearer approach it was discovered to be ridden by a small and hatless boy. The horse galloped up and slid to a halt. The small boy, one of Calloway's youngsters, panting with excitement and the rush of his ride, straightened his bare legs and wiped an exceedingly dirty face on his sleeve. His mount, white with lather where leather or blanket touched its hide, soaked with sweat elsewhere, stood with spread legs and dropped head. Its flanks heaved like hard-pumped bellows and its red nostrils blew in and out.

"You'n' Kansas are wanted instanter, sheriff!" shrilled the small boy, pop-eyed with importance.

"What for?" asked Jake Rule, for young Calloway was not manifesting the respect due his office.

"You'll see," replied the small boy. "The stage's been held up again south o' Injun Ridge an' they robbed the gov'nor o' the Territory of his gold watch an' all

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his money an' he's wild an' he wants to see you right away."

The small boy bobbed his head in emphasis and sat up stiffly. It is not given to every young man to carry messages for a governor. Dignity swelled the chest of him till his damp shirt stretched alarmingly.

The sheriff and the deputy stared stupidly.

"You mean the gov'nor was in the stage?" Jake Rule queried in stricken tones.

"Shore," yawped the child, wriggling bare toes, "an' he was robbed an' he wants to see you an' Kansas. He's mad, you bet. Y'oughta hear him. He's cussin' an' swearin' like all gitout. He's got it in for you an' Kansas. He said you wasn't no good either o' yuh, or yuh'd shore wipe these road-agents out."

The last sentence ended in a full-lunged shout, for Rule and his deputy had started on their return trip. And they traveled at speed. Young Calloway looked at the three men and laughed infectiously.

"That gov'nor man will shore crawl their humps," said he.

"Slide off, sonny," invited Miss Lorimer. "I got a piece o' pie for you."

"I ain't sonny," denied the boy, tilting a snub nose. "I'm Sam Brown Calloway. What—what kind o' pie is it?"

"Dried apple. Do you like candy?"

Sam Brown Calloway did not hesitate. He was dignified no longer. He slipped to the ground and spatted into the kitchen.

Bill Derr slouched forward, his forearms braced across the saddle horn. There was unholy mirth in his washed-out gray eyes.

"The gov'nor held up," he chuckled, "that's a real joke."

"Y'betcha," said Red. "I heard him make a speech once about how tame the West was gettin'. Guess he'll have to make him a new speech now."

"He'll just about snatch the sheriff baldheaded," contributed Lorimer.

"An' serve him right," averred Red. "Bill, why don't you get in on this?"

"Time enough when they ask me. After all, Jake an' Kansas oughta be able to curry this hoss."

"They'd oughta," assented Red. "Oh, they'd oughta all right, but will they? An' another thing: Can they?"

"If they don't, yuh'll have a new sheriff. Do I see a spring over yonder? I do. Hoss, get a-goin'. I'm thirsty."

"You dropped yore knife, missis." It was the voice of Sam Brown Calloway speaking to Miss Lorimer.

"It isn't mine, dear. Why, how funny! It has dad's initials."

At this Red hastily stuffed both hands into the pockets of his trousers and explored with his fingers. In the bottom of the right hand pocket was a hole. A knife, were it so minded, could easily slip through this hole. Red damned the child under his breath.

"Whatsa matter?" asked Lorimer. "Leg hurt?"

"Bit my tongue," lied Red, his ears pricked for further revelations.

These came presently.

"Here's a dime in the corner," announced the clear young voice. "Didja lost a dime, missis."

"No, dear, I didn't. Ask my fa— Why, it has the same initials the knife has."

"What's this?" asked Lorimer, leaning round the corner of the jamb. "What didja find with my initials on it?"

Sam Brown Calloway brought him the broken jack-knife and the dime.

"They yourn, mister?" he asked.

Lorimer held the two articles in the palm of his hand and fingered them curiously.

"Now ain't that amazin'," said he. "My initials an' everythin'."

"Lessee." Red peered over his shoulder, making a great show of hunting through various pockets. "I lost them," he went on in a tone of great surprize. "I never knowed it till this minute. Got a hole in my pocket."

He stretched out a hand for the jack-knife and the dime. Before he could touch them the shadow of Bill Derr's horse fell across the bench.

"Where," asked Bill Derr, "didja get John Hudson's knife?"

Red's hand paused in midair. Then he continued the motion and picked up the jack-knife and the dime. He did not look at Lorimer, although he knew that Lorimer's black eyes, narrowed to glittering slits, were fixed on his face. He looked down at what he held and turned over the dime to look at the initials.

"Here," said he, holding up his hand toward Derr. "Is the dime Hudson's too?"

Bill Derr leaned from the saddle, took the jack-knife and the dime and examined them minutely. There was a tight-strained

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silence for the moment. Red, with every appearance of an ease he did not feel, smoothed down his ruffled hair. Bill Derr handed back the knife and dime.

"They're John Hudson's all right," he declared. "I've seen Hud whittlin' with that very knife. He was a great feller to whittle. Always a-doin' it—when he wasn't doin' somethin' else. Here's somethin' he whittled." He fished from a vest-pocket a beautifully finished little wood-carving of an Indian girl's head and held it up between thumb and forefinger for all to see. "He gimme this once an' I've always kep' it, it's—it's so sort o' cunnin' like. Not that I got any use for Hud—now. This here dime with the initials," he went on, dropping the carving back into his pocket, "is a pocket-piece o' his. Lucky piece, he called it. I've been playin' cards with him an' when the luck would go against him he'd take this dime out an' spin her three times. He said it brought him luck. I dunno as it ever did, though."

"Seems like you knowed him pretty well, Bill."

"I'd oughta. He only lived five mile north o' my shack. We was right friendly, the tarrapin, till he sloped with my hoss an' some other gent's cattle, so yuh needn't go lookin' cross-eyed at me thataway."

Red laughed outright.

"Sun was in my eyes," said he. "What I'd like to know is where the B L fits in. If his name's John Hudson, why ain't it J. H.?"

"Brand," explained Bill Derr. "B L was his iron. He only owned three hosses an' a dog but he had a brand alla same just like he was somebody."

Red turned toward Lorimer and smiled.

"For a minute I guess yuh thought I was this John Hudson gent, didn't yuh?" asked Red Kane.

"Shore not," Lorimer assured him. "I—I guess I'll have a smoke."

Red winked at Bill Derr.

"If I ain't too personal, Red," said the latter, "would you mind tellin' me where an' when you found them things?"

"I found—" began Red, then stopped abruptly, for it struck him that if he replied truthfully Bill Derr would undoubtedly wish to know why he hadn't reported his find to the proper authorities.

It was obviously impossible to explain that he had refrained because he half-suspected Lorimer. To make a bad business worse, Lorimer was beginning to think in another direction. Red guessed as much by the rigidity of his body and the tapping of his fingers on the edge of the bench.

"G'on," urged Derr.

"No," Red said firmly, bound to reach shore if he could. "Nemmine where I found them things. I know yore li'l' game, Bill. Yo're on the lookout for the reward. Yeah. Well, I'm tellin' yuh, cowboy, if they's any reward comin' I'm gonna glom on to it. Yessir, li'l' ol' me myself. Maybe I'll let Tom in on it. I dunno yet. But anyway, it's gonna stay right in the Kane family where it'll do the most good."

"Hawg," said Derr. "I'd be ashamed to be so greedy."

"Then whatcha wanna know for?" demanded Red.

To which question there was no answer.

When Bill Derr, together with Calloway's child, had ridden away toward Farewell, Lorimer squinted up at the sky and coughed.

"Funny how them things had my initials on 'em," he observed.

"Yeah," drawled Red. "Ain't it?"

"Yeah, it is. —— funny. You didn't know them was my initials, didja?"

"How could I know?" Red turned the most innocent eyes in the world on the other man. "You'd never told me yore front name. An' yore daughter always called yuh 'pa.' "

This was skinning the cat both ways with a vengeance, yet truth was unshamed.

"Yo're right; I didn't," admitted the nester. "Tom Dowling called me Lorimer, too, I remember."

"Shore. Lookit, don't you guess if I'd knowed yore initials I'd 'a' said somethin'. Lordy, man, why wouldn't I say somethin'? Why wouldn't I, huh?

"And you'd better be sure and certain about it before you start drivin', pa," cut in Dot Lorimer, leaning over the window-sill. "You know yourself you jump at conclusions too much."

"I guess I'm a fool," said Lorimer. "I'm too hasty, maybe. No hard feelin's?"

"I dunno of any." Red shook his head.

"That'll be good. Dot, how 'bout a couple o' them doughnuts just to sort o' keep us from fallin' in till dinner?"

TO BE CONTINUED

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THE SWEAT-BATHS OF WEST AFRICA

BY THOMAS S. MILLER

THE sweat-bath, like the onion, is world-wide and common to civilization and savagery and every stage in between. In Nigeria—land of blacks and fetishes and *ju-ju* gods and Mohammedanism—it has its own peculiar features. As the traveler enters the hut lanes of the adobe towns of northern Nigeria his ears may be assailed by a furious racket of tom-toms, horns, rattles and a groaning and wailing. If he will follow the noise to its source he will come to a clay hut with thatched roof. Over the door hangs a reed mat, around the edges of which escapes a steamlike vapor.

If he will make a careful inspection he will find a small hole in the wall of the hut. If he will put an eye to this hole he will be immediately transported to the fancy land of the Arabian Nights. But he must be careful not to block the hole, for it is there to give the evil spirit that obsesses the patient who is taking the sweat-bath means of escape when the wizard-herbalist has coaxed and frightened it out by exhortation and noise, which, in sober sense, means when the patient is beginning to mend under the heroic kill-or-cure sweat-bath treatment of fever.

The victim lies on a bed of cow dung, buried in the filth up to his chin. Several wailing aged women, in the bronze sheath-gowns they were born in, are sprinkling the stablings with hot water from clay pots heated over a charcoal brazier. The temperature is around a hundred and forty. They move around in the foul vapors like hag-shapes in Inferno. The stench, the grotesque wizard's groanings and weird incantations whistled through a hollowed stick, the dancing shadows of a smoky grass wick in a calabash of nut oil, the fantastic necromancy and spirit-conjuring make a picture unearthly, unreal. With a wooden spoon he feeds a burning red-pepper mash to the patient.

If it is a case of lumbago he does terrible surgery. The patient is rolled on his stomach. In the small of his back the wizard makes incisions and rubs in lime and red-pepper—lime and red-pepper into the bleeding, quivering flesh! So it goes on for several days and nights, until the victim succumbs or the evil spirit is driven out, when the hole is quickly plugged lest it come back again. And the blacks outside fly to their huts and shut them air-tight and shriek and groan to scare off the evil spirit, or artfully make conversations with it, telling it to go away elsewhere, that they love it, have no enmity to it, but would much prefer that it went on to the next village, or they invite it to enter the body of some enemy.

They hang up charms—leopard's teeth, or cowries festooned in the human hair of a "witch" recently hounded to death. The rascally wizard does a thriving business in charms and, whether he is the dupe of his own nonsense or whether he is consciously camouflaging the sweating process, only he and his kind know. He may invite the evil spirit to possess a goat—may use his occult powers to get it into the goat, which he then leads off to his skull-festooned hut in the bush, no doubt to have a nice haunch of goat-meat when no one is around.

The Czar of Russia never owned such power as the wizard wields over his dupes. Never was ruler feared, reverenced, obeyed as are the wizards of Nigeria, witch-doctors of the sweating process. But, curiously enough, if one will dig down deep enough under civilization, and not so deep after all, he will find the sweat-bath of filth and the gross superstition. Bathing in the warm blood of fresh-slaughtered hogs is believed to be a sure cure for ague among our Latin immigrants, whilst the "drawing" power of poultices of offal is a firmly rooted fetish among the lower-class Russians and Lithuanians.

Nor is it so many generations ago that our doctors were propounding vile nostrums from snake-skins, snails, mud, excretions—anything vile enough to appeal to the imagination; and, as for the belief that sickness is an obsession, an evil spirit, the superstition is as common as are many that not a few of us consider seriously—for instance that walking under a ladder brings bad luck. So why laugh so immoderately at the sweat-baths of Nigeria? Leave it to the medical missionary.

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THE SNAKE

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

LOOK, *senhores!* There at the edge of the jungle—that dull cone—Ah, it is gone. We have passed it. The flooding Amazon waits for no man to stand and gaze, and I wonder not that your fever-dulled eyes failed to see it in the moonlight. I saw it because I am of the bush and if I do not see those things—I die.

Ah, but you are lucky, *senhores*, to be here on this steamer, with the rubber lands left behind you and the far-off ocean ahead. Lucky, though you carry in your bones the quaking fever and in your minds dreadful memories. You say that six of you went in among these headwaters and that you two alone survive? It is ever so. Of the few who go up the Javary, fewer return. We Brazilians know all too well the deaths that lurk for men up that river, for with our own eyes we have seen them. Yet the rubber work pays well, and for those of us who live the stake is worth the daring. And now we are all of us lucky to be here, *senhores*, you two Americans and I. Lucky, too, that we were no nearer to that coiled cone beside the water, for it could kill us all. It was the terrible master of the swamps—the *sucuruju!*

That startles you? Perhaps you, too, know that giant serpent which here grows to the length of ten tall men and which holds such diabolical power. Even the one fleeting glimpse of it over there caused my heart to stop an instant from double shock—shock of sudden fear, of which I am not ashamed, and shock of surprize that the *sucuruju* should rise before me as if my thoughts had summoned him. For I was thinking of him, and my thoughts were born of your words.

You were speaking, *senhores*, of the Snake. Of the Snake—that man-devil in the flesh, that killer of men and destroyer of women, who had the swiftness, the cunning, the deadliness and the dread fascination of the serpent, and whom no man could slay. You know of him only by hearsay, for he went before you came. Yet his very name and the tales you have heard so fascinate you that you argue about his sudden disappearance from the earth even as the Peruvians, Ecuadoreans and Brazilians who knew him all too well have argued.

You said, even as others have said, that no doubt he still lives; that for reasons of his own he has thought it wise to vanish for a time, and that presently he will come back. Those who say this know not the Snake. Not for any living thing would he creep away and hide. He is gone forever, because a greater devil than himself destroyed him utterly. And I saw it done.

Yes, I. And I have not spoken of it to men because—I did not choose. But now I have left this accursed region behind me for all time, and——

No, do not glance at each other so. I did not kill him. Did I not say that no man could slay him? *Senhores*, I have seen this with my own eyes: once I saw the

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Snake shot four times with rifles, and I saw him, with those big bullets in him, walk up to the men who shot him and kill them with his knife!

The brothers Marques they were—Joao and José. They were mad with hate of him, and they shot him with their Winchesters. And yet, riddled through, he walked up to them, his white teeth gleaming, his glittering eyes on theirs, and they became paralyzed. And with his knife forward—so—he came to Joao, the elder brother, and stabbed—so—and drew upward! Just as you split a fish, *senhores*. And Joao screamed once and fell.

Then José turned and sprang away. But the Snake spun sidewise; he lengthened himself, like any snake striking from his coil, and his red knife flicked across the throat, and José was a headless corpse! And then he turned and looked at us standing there agape, and we froze. We live hard lives, and we fear few things, but we stood there motionless, and cold sweat burst out on us. Then he turned and walked away into the jungle, swaying a little and stepping stiffly and staining the ground red from his wounds.

For weeks we prayed that he was dead. We told one another that he must be dead—and looked over our shoulders even while we talked. Then he came into a village down the river, took a woman and went away. The word came to us that he showed no sign of a wound. By what devil's herb he made himself whole we know not. But he lived—and we cursed.

It was his destruction of women that made men grind their teeth and hate him with a burning hate. For he destroyed them utterly. The woman he took was lost. Some say that when he tired of a woman he drove her out to starve or die among the jungle beasts; others, that he handed her over to the cannibal Indians. And a few declare he slew and ate her himself! It may be so. What became of them, no man knows. But they never returned—save one. And of her you shall hear.

DO NOT think the women went willingly. They hated him, feared him, as a woman hates and fears any reptile. Yet he had that awful power in his eyes that the giant serpent has: the power to make others do his will. As I have told you, he could paralyze the hands of strong men armed with rifles and hold them frozen while he killed them. How, then, should a woman combat him? They went—and disappeared.

And so the time came when he took my girl from me.

She was a good girl, *senhores;* she was young and strong and beautiful. That was why he chose her, of course. It had been better for her had she been ill-favored or frail, for then he would have passed her by. But she was graceful and curving and tempting and strong with the velvety strength of the jaguar. She had a fiery strength of mind and temper, too, and she was fearless beyond most women. She would have gone with me unafraid into the outermost *tambos* of the rubber forest, had I not sternly forbade her; for of course we take no women into those places, where even men go only with rifles ready. But I had a pretty fight to make her stay at the headquarters of the *coronel*, where she might be safe and I could come to see her at times. Yet I have a will of my own, and in the end she obeyed me, as a woman should.

That strength of hers, that strength of body and mind, later made her able to fight the Snake and somehow to come back to me before the end. For even to the *coronel's* place the Snake came and took her. And he had to take her by force, for in spite of his evil power of the eye she fought him. With the strength of loathing and despair she fought him. And he laughed, they tell me, laughed like a demon as he carried her away.

When one came to us far out in the jungle and told us, I, too, became a demon. I am a quiet man, and I like peace. But when I knew this Snake had carried off my Lucia, I hungered for blood; I burned to hack him to pieces and stamp the pieces into pulp. For days I went here and there like a madman, seeking him with my rifle and machete and living I know not how. But no man knew where he might be found; he left no more trace than a bird in air. And at last, worn to a skeleton, I came back to headquarters, fit only to die. Yet I could not die, *senhores*, not until I found him. And so I lived on, my blood and brain burning, and waited.

Then at moonrise of a night came a cry

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from some one near the forest. Men ran, and other cries arose and mingled, cries of welcome and rage and sorrow and fury all together. Then came one running to me and told me my Lucia had come back. She had come crawling, *senhores*, crawling on hands and knees down an *estrada* by the river, so that the man who first saw her moving took her for a beast and nearly shot her. And she was——

Senhores, you may have looked on broken women in your own land. But never, never have you seen such a woman as that crawling thing that came back to me. I have told you of her youth, her strength. Now she was old, old! Old and sunken-faced and white of hair, sick unto death and nearly crazed. Yet the dying spirit in her, which had driven her on and on until she came once more to me, burned still in her tortured body; burned on, flickering, while she lay in my arms and told me of the Snake.

What she told me I can not repeat. There are things of which a man can not talk, even to men. But, as I listened, the fire went out of me, and I shivered, and all my body poured out cold sweat, as on the day when the brothers Marques died before my eyes. Not that I feared. No; it was sick shock that made me cold. And at last, when I could hardly endure it to hear more, she suddenly grew rigid and cried:

"He comes! He follows! I see him, the evil one, in his canoe in the moonlight! Oh, my Lourenço, save me!"

While her scream still rang in our ears, she died.

Then women wailed and men groaned. But I made no sound. I was dumb. I arose and took my rifle and machete and went to my canoe. I went up the river in the moonlight: up the river, because she had come from there. And I knew her parting soul had seen the Snake through the jungle, following, following even as she said.

I moved almost without knowing it. I was like a man stunned. I made no plan. I only paddled slowly up-river to meet and kill him, because that was the thing to do. Yet I paddled near the bank, where I would not be in the full light of the moon. I looked at nothing but the empty river ahead, and how far I went I do not know.

There came a little sound from the bank near me, and I held my paddle to look. A small stream flowed into the river, and the sound had come from there. My eyes were full of moon-glare, and I saw nothing in the bush. I went on again, but soon my hands stopped. Something told me to go back. Something drew me toward that little stream. I let the canoe float down to it and past it. As before, I saw nothing. There was no sound there now. Far off in the jungle the howling monkeys made uproar, but near me it was quiet. When I had floated down below the place, my paddle began to move. The same thing that had brought me back now drew me forward again until I reached that mouth of the brook. And there something told me to go ashore.

I did not want to go ashore. I began to feel fear. I drove my paddle into the water and started up-river. But I did not go far. My hands moved as if weights were growing on them. I felt as if a line were fastened to the stern, pulling me back. And I seemed unable to think. Something else seemed to be controlling my thoughts and making me return to that place. Soon my paddle stopped again, and for the third time I went back to that brook. There I sat staring—and suddenly I saw.

A WIND blew, and the trees moved, and the moonlight fell on a dark space. And there I saw a great coiled cone. It was higher than I am when I stand straight. And at the bottom of the cone, lying flat on the ground, was the great head and yellow eyes of the *sucurujú*!

That was what had called me back. That was what held me now as a lesser snake may hold a bird or small animal. That was what was drawing me to go ashore. And somehow I did not feel fear now. I felt only that I must bring my canoe up to the land and step out. Still, I did not do it. I sat there, and the canoe drifted slowly down and away.

The monster did not move. The branches had swung back, and the moonlight was shut out from the place where he waited; but still I could see him in the dark and feel more than ever the terrible summons that would make me return for the last time. I had to go back; I knew I had to go back. But—just then there came another sound.

It was a bump. Up the river a canoe

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had bumped against something in the water. I looked toward the sound. And suddenly, *senhores*, fury and hate exploded in me like a cartridge exploding in a rifle. It blasted the dreadful hold of the *sucuruju* away from me, and it burned out the cold that had been in my blood since my Lucia told me of her fate. The canoe was the one I had gone to meet—that of the Snake.

He was not paddling fast. His canoe was hardly more than drifting. No doubt he was enjoying his slow progress, picturing to himself how he would go ashore at headquarters and see if she were there and take her away again if he found her. Perhaps he was planning how he would torture her; for she was the first woman who had ever escaped him, and of course he did not know she was dead. Like myself, he was near the bank, but not so near as I, and I saw him clearly against the moonshine. I felt for my rifle with my foot, then changed my mind. I am a good shot, but shooting would not satisfy me—no, not though I shot him to pieces. I must get my hands on him, feel his throat in my clutch, cut him apart with my knife. Only so could my Lucia be avenged and my hate be sated.

My canoe had floated down beyond reach of the *sucuruju*. Out from the bank lay a fallen tree, and I grasped a branch and held the canoe still without a bump. I would lie there, hidden against the black trunk, until he came to me. Then would I jump my canoe at his and throw him overboard and leap in upon him. And then would I strangle him and knife him and drown him, all at once. I would split him as he had split Joao. True, he would kill me, too, and the *piranhas*, those cannibal fish, would devour us both. But this did not matter. I had nothing to live for now.

He came on, dipping his paddle slowly, until he had passed the little brook. My muscles were tense to shove out and at him. But suddenly he loooked back and held his canoe still. He held it there, it seemed to me, for hours, though of course it was but a moment. Then he turned it about and went slowly back up-stream, still scowling at the same place on the bank. A few strokes and he stopped again and sat staring as I had stared—at the gloomy lair of the *sucuruju*.

The evil power had caught him, too, *senhores*. The power of the monster snake had reached out to the human snake and drawn him back. And he did not know what it was. The wind did not blow now, and there was no light in that black pocket of the bank; so he could not see the thing I had seen. If he had known what lay there, who can say what would have happened? Would he have killed it? Or could he have put his own terrible will on it with his eyes and driven it away and then laughed like a devil? I know not. I tell you only what I saw.

He hung there a little time, and then he turned away and down-river. But he looked back, and, before he reached me, he swerved about and returned. I saw him shake his shoulders, as if to throw off something, and he growled low in his throat. Back at the mouth of the stream he held his canoe quiet once more. And then, while I hung breathless to my tree, he pushed gradually up to shore.

No, he did not go as I would have gone—helpless, dumb and dazed. He went as if seeking the thing that dared to summon him, as if it angered him to feel the control of another's will. He went as if he were the hunter instead of the prey. But he went, *senhores*, he went!

I heard a slight watery noise as he stepped out. I slipped my canoe out without a sound, stroked a few times and waited.

Suddenly from that black place there burst a scream—a horrible, long, wailing scream. It rose and rose—and broke in an awful gasping groan. Then came a dull crack, and then more of them—*crack-crack-crack*—like muffled pistol shots: the breaking of the Snake's bones as the *sucuruju* crushed, crushed, crushed! Then another moan, low and dying. Then more crunching. Then silence. And last the long hiss of the *sucuruju*!

Long after the current had carried me down around a bend in the banks I sat staring up the moonlit river, seeing in my mind the thing that had happened there in the black mouth of the brook. After me floated the canoe of the Snake, sucked away from the shore and drifting empty and useless. At length my own boat stuck on a mud-bar. I waited for that other to draw near and shoved it away with my paddle, and it went on down the river until I saw it no more. And then I freed myself from the bar and went to my dead Lucia.

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SO NOW, *senhores*, you know why the Snake vanished. He lived without mercy; he tortured and destroyed body, mind, and soul. He died in agony and despair and fear, and, when Death coiled around him and crushed him like a rat, he screamed like any one of those he destroyed. He went into the belly of a snake greater than himself, and that was the end of him and his power and his evil. And I go now to my home far down the great river, where I may forget.

THE GREAT INTENSIFIER

BY ROBERT V. CARR

GIRL-EYED men with peevish faces,
In these silent desert places,
In the heat and in the sand
Of this harsh and lonely land,
Whine and fret o'er trifles mean
And become more epicene.

Dull-eyed men with listless faces,
In these silent desert places,
In the fight and in the stress
With this flaming wilderness,
Bleat and fail, to droop dismayed—
Shiftless dawdlers in the shade.

Snake-eyed men with fiendish faces,
In these silent desert places,
In the cool and in the murk,
Where the gray sidewinders lurk,
Come to brood their murders o'er—
Deadlier than e'er before.

Bold-eyed men with laughing faces,
In these silent desert places,
In the swelt and in the glare
Of this land of Never-care,
Sing and shout their ribaldry
And become more wild and free.

Stern-eyed men with granite faces,
In these silent desert places,
In the sun and in the dust
Of this realm of waterlust,
Tap the gun and grow to be
Devotees of liberty.

Calm-eyed men with peaceful faces,
In these silent desert places,
In the hush and in the gloom
Of this vast and starlit room,
Muse and dream and grow to be
Children of divinity.

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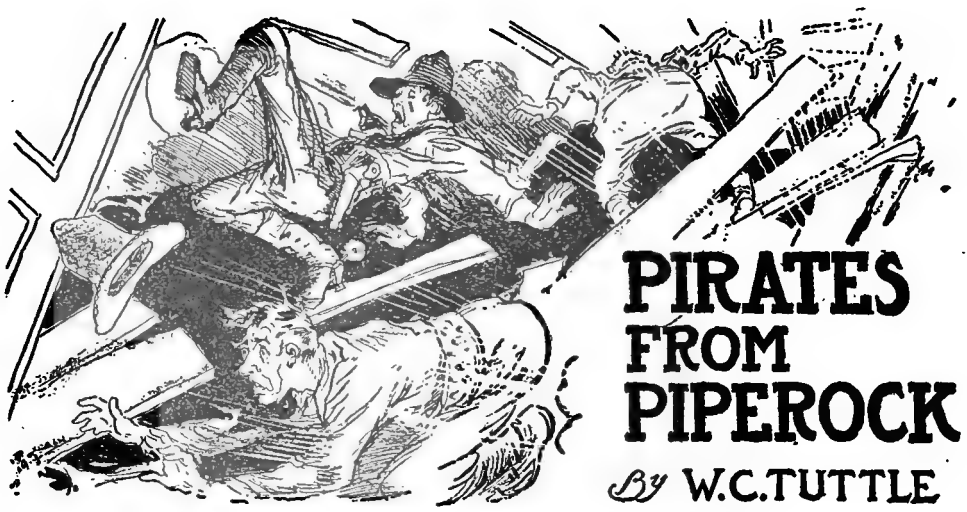

PIRATES FROM PIPEROCK

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Local Option in Loco Land," "Pariahs of Piperock," etc.

"Oh, I am a pirate bold,
My ocean a desert of sand,
My ship is a jackass gray.
I cruise all over the land;
My flag is an old black hat,
With bullet holes galore.
I've trod the bridge
Of this gol-darned ridge
Till my blasted hoofs are sore."

"DIRTY SHIRT JONES," says I, "them words are all right, but your voice proclaims that you comes from a family of woodpeckers."

And then me and Dirty Shirt meets "Solemn" Sales. We pokes into a little cabin on the side of the hill, and there we finds a feller setting by a little table, peering at some hand-made figures on a sheet of wrapping-paper.

We announces our names, and he admits his. He's a melancholy-looking hombre, that Solemn person. He indicates a bench and goes on figuring.

"Bookkeeper?" asks Dirty.

"Scientist," says he, sighing like he was looking over his own obituary. "Hard facts are hard facts, and some may disagree, but I figures it to assay about fifty-fifty."

"Even break," nods Dirty, "unless you speak of whisky and water."

"Even so, even so, but that don't answer the question before me. My old pardner, 'Baldy' Benson, got bit by a rattler. Now, according to *materia medica*, the bite of a rattler is pizen: maybe not deadly in all cases, but in order not to confuse the public they uses the word pizen, the same as temperance orators refer to as distilled liquors.

"Anyway, Baldy got bit, and he gallops back here to the shack, where he sets down and absorbs a quart of whisky without taking a breath. Now, according to unofficial practise in such cases, the hooch is an antidote for the snake-bite, and Baldy should have got well or drunk. He didn't do either, gents: he up and died. Now I'm trying to arrive at some conclusion as to his untimely demise. Was it the snake or the hooch, or did them two pizens meet inside of poor Baldy and cause spontaneous combustion?"

"What kind of whisky?" asks Dirty Shirt.

"Well," says Solemn, "that's going too deep. In such a case you'd have to find out the pizenous principles, degree of peevishness and length of fang of the snake. I pass the hand and call for a drink."

"Of the same kind that Baldy suicided on?" I asks.

"Daw-w-w-w-w-w—gone," Solemn drawls it out and grins joyful like. "That's her! Suicide, induced primarily by being scared of snakes. You sure are quick at figures. If you'll go with me to Horse Heaven I'll buy us each a drink."

"Horse Heaven?" asks Dirty.

"Yeah. Never heard of the town? Well, you ain't lost much."

"Nice place?" I asks, and Solemn snorts.

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"Worse than that. Horse Heaven was sired by a bunch of crooked gamblers and damned by everybody that ever climbed up the main street. This here trail you comes on leads to the placer mines on Hondo Creek and also to the mines on Lost Horse.

"They makes life miserable for gamblers and saloonkeepers in both localities; so they comes here to the only spring within miles, builds their temples of chance in another county and gets them going and coming. *Sabe?*

"Each and every one of them saloons has a following, and between pay-days and suckers they spends their time trying to kill each other off. I ain't been up there for two days, 'cause another pay-day ain't far off and they covets each other's chances. Gents, she's a bad town: bad in heart and soul. Still wishful to see how she works?"

"Well," says Dirty, "me and Ike can breathe freely in any place that a he-human can endure. Lead on, and may Horse Heaven regret it."

"Horse Heaven can take care of itself."

"Which is an admirable quality," I admits.

According to all things which are true as Gospel, horses don't go to Heaven, and this is the reason why this here goat refuge gets its name—a horse couldn't get there. It sets right on top of the world. There's just one side of a street, composed of four saloons, a general store and an undertaking shop.

You have to hang on to a rope to climb up to the first saloon; then you walk on a level to the next, slide to the next, from which you can almost hop off on to the roof of the fourth. Next comes the store, and, if by the time you get that far you have anything left, there is still the undertaker left to contend with, and he keeps a looped rope handy on the porch.

SEEMS that Horse Heaven was built high and handsome thataway on account of the fresh water spring, which bubbles out of the top of the hill. Solemn says that the water is on the American plan—there if you want it and handy to wash in if you feels dudish.

The saloons are named the Ace of Diamonds, King of Clubs, Queen of Spades and Ten of Hearts. Dirty reads the names from a distance and opines that they're short one card of being a straight.

"All they need is a knave," says he.

"You don't know the town," sighs Solemn. "They don't need any more."

"Looks like a feudal hangout," observes Dirty.

"Well," Solemn spits about five miles down the hill. "Education is mighty nice, I reckon. I don't *sabe* that word, but you can't say anything bad about the town and get an argument out of me."

"Incorporated?" asks Dirty.

"Disintegrated," says Solemn. "Everybody hates everybody else. It's just a town—that's all. Over the Ace of Diamonds is Delmonico's hotel, but nobody hives up there on account of the floors being too thin to stop lead from below.

"I orates that the name don't fit at all, being as the original Delmonico's ain't no hotel. 'Poetry' Peters replies aloud that the original ain't got nothing on the imitation, cause the bedbugs prevents it from being a place of rest.

"The town sort of takes sides in the argument, the same of which causes an undertaker to open a place of business. Six solid citizens gets presented with tombstones. Since that time there ain't been nothing but ill feeling and a falling off in marshals."

"I don't reckon any sane man wants the job of marshal here," observes Dirty.

"Nope," agrees Solemn, "I reckon not. Don't know who will get the job after I'm gone."

"Marshal?" asks Dirty. "You ain't got no jail, judge nor justice."

"Nope."

"What do you do with a prisoner?" I asks.

"Lead him to Broadway and Fifth avenue and kick him off."

"Do they ever come back to trouble you?" asks Dirty.

"Nope. Mostly always they don't even look back."

Then we stops to rest on the steps of the undertaking shop. We ain't been there long when out comes a woful-looking Jasper. He's got a long, lean neck which don't noways fill up his collar, and his narrow face is plentifully covered with straw-colored stubble. He's only about five feet three inches high, and he's wearing a suit of clothes that was made for a lodge-pole.

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He sort of jerks his head back and forth in that collar like a turkey buzzard walking on a hot rock.

"Howdy, Marshal," says he, pecking his head back and forth at each word.

"Tolerable, 'Tombstone.' How's business?"

He peers at me and Dirty and wipes his mouth with the back of his scrawny hand.

"Strangers?" he asks. "Strangers to Horse Heaven?"

"You don't reckon they'd be here if they wasn't, do you?" asks Solemn. "This one is named Ike Harper, and the other one is Dirty Shirt Jones. Gents, meet Tombstone Taylor."

"Five feet nine inches," says he, shaking hands with me and peering from the top of my head to my toes, and then he looks at Dirty.

"About two inches less. Mr. Harper is wide in the shoulders and bowed in the legs, but in a pinch I can spring the sides a little. Glad to meet you."

"My ——!" grunts Dirty, wide-eyed. "Did you ever see such a wide-awake business man in your life, Ike?"

"Tombstone is a successor to the business," explains Solemn. "His uncle was here first, but he made a mistake. When 'Rusty' Rawlins died, his pal, 'Fried Egg' Freeman, opines that nothing is too good for Rusty; so he opines to have a suitable tombstone engraved.

"Fried Egg wasn't any too well educated, but he wrote out what he wanted on that stone and hands same to the undertaker, who made all his own tombstones. The stone was in place when Fried Egg came back; so he goes out to look her over. The epitaph reads:

RUSTY RAWLINS WAS A LOCOED CELEBRATER. USE YOUR OWN JUDGMENT

"Fried Egg looks it over and then comes up here. Him and the undertaker glares at each other.

" 'Whyfor does you go against orders and prescription?' asks Fried Egg. 'I said that Rusty was a local celebrity—daw-w-w-w-gone you! Also and moreover, you didn't put on that last part, Not Dead But Sleeping.'

" 'I deciphers your screed as she shows,' replies the undertaker, 'and as far as that last part goes—I won't bunco anybody. *Sabe?* I laid him out myself after he's dead three days in July, and I'm orating aloud that you're either lying or badly mistaken.' "

"Such is true," grins Tombstone. "They both shoots at the same time. I buried Fried Egg in a casket we brought here for you, Marshal—the one with silverine handles. I got this suit off uncle. That was a big day for me, gents. I ain't got much stock left, but she's open for inspection. Name-plates as follows: Father, Mother, He Done Well and Gone Hence. Which do you prefer?"

"My ——!" snorts Dirty, wide-eyed. "Let's get a drink before I gets morbid and starts killing."

"Pick 'em short of six feet," says Tombstone. "'Cause I can't splice a casket."

We climbs on a little ways, and then Solemn says—

"You fellers ain't getting cold feet, are you?"

"Us?" Dirty stops and looks Solemn over. "Say, feller, did you ever hear of the Pirates of Piperock? Did you? Well, me and Ike are the last survivors. *Sabe?* We came away to let the place grow. Ain't it true, Ike?"

"Well," says I, "that was mostly the reason, and the other reason was because we ran out of planks to walk 'em on."

"Pirates?" says Solemn, scratching his head. "Name's familiar."

"Gosh!" grunts Dirty. "This sure is an unenlightened village, Ike."

"I reckon you fellers are humdingers all right," admits Solemn. "You'll do well——"

A bullet hums off a rock beside us, and we all ducks down.

"Now," says Solemn, "that's to be expected, I reckon. Thought maybe I could do better, being as I've got company; still this is further up than I've been able to go for two days. Mostly always they send me behind a rock down below Tombstone's place."

COMES the whang of another shot, but we don't hear the lead.

"Now I wonder—" begins Solemn, lifting his hat above the top of the rock and pulling it down quick. Then he shoved it up again.

"That's one good thing about the town,"

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says he, putting on his hat and stepping out into the trail. "Come on, gents. Somebody got the bushwhacker who was sniping at us."

Me and Dirty looks foolish-like at each other. We ain't exactly meek and mild, but this place is different than what we've seen, and this survival of the best shots don't appeal to us very much.

We climbs along for a minute, and then Solemn stops. He points to a lot of writing on a flat rock, the words painted big in white, and this is what we reads:

I think that some day I will come and put you bad-men on the bum: That will be swell. Then me and you, who've stood the shocks and peddled lead from behind rocks and dodged and ducked from morn 'til night and shot at everything in sight, can rise right up amid the dust and make a better town or bust. But 'til I do I'll keep away, and to ye all I hereby say—

Horse Heaven go to ——!

"Sweet thoughts," says Dirty, and just then another bullet comes along and leaves a dirty smear across them white letters. Dirty is so cock-eyed that he can only shoot one gun at a time, but what he can't do with that one gun won't ever bother old man Colt.

"Poetry Peters wrote that poem," explains Solemn, as we humps down behind the rock. "He's been chased out several times, 'cause he's in favor of a straight game. He sneaked up here one morning, and, between answering shots with the population and writing that poem, he spent about eight hours."

A feller sticks his head out of the store and peers around. He's got a pipe in his mouth.

"I hate a pipe," says Dirty, and just then his gun roars beside me, and I see that feller yank his head back, but not soon enough to save the pipe-bowl from erasure. He spits out the stem and falls back through the door. It was about a hundred-foot shot.

"My gosh!" grunts Solemn. "Did you shoot at that pipe?"

"Hit it, didn't I?" asks Dirty.

"Daw-w-w-w-w-w—gone!"

Another shot comes from the door of the store, and my perfectly good sombrero gets lifted high. That hat cost me fifteen dollars five years ago, and having it mussed makes me sore; so I unhooks six shots into the door of that place, and Dirty shoots out what remains of the window. Another shot seems to irritate Solemn; so he empties his gun for general results.

"We better move," says Solemn. "Otherwise that fool 'Bull' Burgoyne will wipe out all of Poetry's poem, and besides I ain't noways prepared for a siege. You fellers both shoot .41s and mine is a .44. Let's sneak around the side and see if Bull will sell us some shells. If we can kill him first, we can save money, 'cause he charges three prices for his daw-w-w-w-w—gone shells."

We ducks low and lopes across Broadway, where we hugs the side of the store. Solemn hammers on the wall and yells—

"Bull, do you hear me?"

No reply, and then Solemn states:

"You has aroused my ire, Bull, and I'm going to damage you if you don't change your ways. *Sabe?* If you don't hang your empty hands out of the window and bid us welcome, I'm going to make you hard to catch like a coyote."

"Come in," yelps a muffled voice, and we ducked around to the front and skidded inside.

At first we don't see anything of the proprietor, but all to once we sees a pile of sacked flour on the floor, and from under it sticks a hand. We lifts the sacks to one side and lets Bull Burgoyne stand up.

"I have dem sacks flour hang up by a rope to ceiling so de pack-rat she can't eat," he pants, making up a rheumatic face. "An' den along comes bullet and cuts der rope when I'm be-low. By gar, I'm bus' up complete, Solemn."

"How's business?" asks Solemn.

"Bad today. Pretty soon I have customer—plenty. Everybody in town she shoot and shoot for two day. Bimeby she's run out of shell, an' den Bull he's mak' money, eh? You bet!"

"Anybody get killed?" asks Solemn.

"Me, I'm not know. Poetry Peters, she's get loco and come here. She's aim for clean up place. *Sabe?* Poetry, she's wear tar and fedder. You know Bill La Fond? She's pardnair for Poetry. She's lose money and get shot at plenty, ba gosh! Me, I'm weesh she's come back. She's owe me for forty pounds of giant powder. Five small box.

"I tell Bill to stay here while I eat myself for lunch. When I come back, she's gone with those boxes powdair. I

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find note which I can't read. Maybe you read, eh, Solemn?"

Bull limps down to a cupboard and comes back with a dirty piece of paper, which he hands to Dirty. It says:

"I go way to bust up bob-tail. This dam town make me sick. My gun is wrong size; so I take your gun and shells. Also for your rifle I take all .50-110 shell. Much oblige."

"What he mean?" asked Bull.

"He took your gun and shells, 'cause his gun was the wrong size. He must have taken your rifle and some ammunition. Sell me a box of .44's, Bull."

"De sonn-of-a-gonn!" snorted Bull. "He tak' giant powdair, too, eh?"

He folds up the paper and walks around behind the counter.

"You say you wan'—*sacre!* Everyt'ing she's gone! No ca'tridge lef'! De sonn-of-a-gonn take everyt'ing!"

Bull snapped his gun open and dropped it on the counter.

"She's so good like fish-pole!" says he disgusted-like.

"Ain't you got no shells at all, Bull?" asks Solemn.

"Sure. I'm got one box for .22 and one box ten gage shotgun. You want to buy, Solemn?"

AND right then Horse Heaven hunted the ammunition wagon. We hears a rattle at the door, a spattering of shots, and three men skidded into the door of the store. They're three as tough-looking hombres as I ever seen. They shakes themselves for possible bullet-holes and then walks closer to us.

"All the .44 shells you've got, Bull," says the tallest one, glaring at us. "I said 'all,' Frenchy!"

"I hear your voice, 'Snap,' " says Bull, shaking his shoulders. "Me, I'm got no shell. Bill La Fond, she's swipe all my shell."

"Don't lie!" snaps the feller.

"Jus' de same as before," says Bull, and they sort of groans.

"How many shells did 'Flash' Findlay and 'Jap' Slack buy today?" asks one of them.

"None. For two day I mak' no sale."

Nobody has anything to say for a while, and then Bull grins and says—

"Snap, I'm hear that Flash Findlay say she's tak' your scalp soon. She's ask the undertaker to have nice casket ready. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" mimicks Snap mean-like. "If I had a shell left, I'd massacree you, Bull."

"Sure," grins Bull. "If I have one lef', Snap, you never get in here."

"Nobody got a danged shell left?" wails one of Snap's gang.

"Strangers excepted," grins Dirty Shirt.

"Daw-w-w-w-w—gone!" drawls Solemn. "This one called Dirty Shirt picked the bowl off Bull's pipe at a hundred feet. Shot from his hip, too."

"My pardner, Ike Harper, taught me how to shoot thataway," says Dirty, nodding at me, and Solemn says sad-like:

"Gents, let me make you used to the Pirates from Piperock."

"Pirates?" asks Snap, like he hadn't heard.

"Regular reptiles," admits Dirty. "Me and Ike was born in the cane-brakes and rocked in a bark cradle. We're whalebone warp and rawhide filling, and them what *sabes* our past orates that we're the pizenest old pair of pelicans that ever made a track in the sand. We don't like your town; we don't like your manners; and you're the worst shots we ever seen."

"We asks your pardon," says Snap apologetic-like. "There ain't none of us what you'd designate as fancy shots."

"You don't even support an undertaker in style," says I.

"We never invited him up here. Fried Egg Freeman passed out with the original ghoul, and this one, being a relative, naturally inherits."

"You see Beel La Fond?" asks Bull. "She's take everyt'ing."

"Him and Poetry Peters are cooking up devilment," says a *hombre*, whose face contradicts that he ever had a decent thought.

"Them two opines that the morals of—" begins Snap, and just then cometh the earthquake.

The store almost shakes off the hill, and we walks circles like a lot of drunks. Something crashes down in the middle of Broadway, and Snap makes a wobbly rush for the door.

"Wh-what is she?" stutters Bull.

Snap's mustache sticks out like a handful of needles when he turns to us.

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"What is she?" he parrots. "That—" he waves his hand toward the door. "That is the whole danged front of the Ace of Diamonds!"

"That's some of Flash Findlay's work!" yelps one of the gang. "As soon as we comes down here, he dynamites the place!"

"I'm going right up there and smoke him out!" declares Snap. "I'm going to chase the coyote into a hole and plug it up."

"Without a shell in your gun?" asks Bull.

Just then comes a rattle of footsteps on the porch, and into the door comes three men. Two of them falls flat in the doorway, and the other one falls over them as they try to go back.

"Don't shoot, Snap!" yelps one, holding up his hands. "We ain't got a shell left."

"You ain't lying, Flash?"

"Lying ——! Do you think I'd hold up my hands to a lousy coyote like you if I had anything left to shoot with? Give me a box of shells, Bull, and I'll agree not to load up before I get out of range."

"Nobody got any shell, Flash," says Bull. "Every gun is empty."

"Strangers excepted," corrects Solemn.

"Gone?" says one of Flash Findlay's gang foolish-like. "You——"

Blooey!

I seen the goods falling off the shelves just before the counter seems to kick my feet from under me, and something seems to come along and almost obliterate the front of the store. I lands on my neck behind the counter, where a kerosene can seems to irrigate me plentiful. The shelves on the far side have all pulled loose and laid down on the job, and, as far as I can see, me and Dirty are the only survivors.

"Dirty," says I, "what kind of a town are we in?"

"I reckon she's a place where they have Fourth of July every day in the week." And just then a section of them shelves seems to rise up a little, and folks begin to appear.

Flash gets up with a water-bucket hanging around his neck and staggers to the door—or what is left of it—and peers out.

"Hah!" he squeaks, pointing across the way.

Me and Dirty pilgrims over and looks out. There's one corner and the whole front of a building hanging on a pinnacle of rock across the street, and the sign, a big King of Clubs, hangs drunk-like from the top.

"My place!" yelps Flash. "My place!"

"Yeah?" says Dirty indifferent-like. "Why don't you stay home and take care of your property?"

"Who—who—who—" stammers Snap, trying to pull a frying-pan out from under the back of his vest.

"Daw-w-w-w-w-w—gone!" wails Solemn. "Some shake!"

"I—I know who done it!" yelps Flash. "It was them danged anarchists from the Queen of Spades!"

"That's a danged lie!"

WE TURNS and faces a couple of *hombres* who have sneaked into the back door. They look like they had spent a season doing flip-flops into the Grand Cañon.

"That's a killing statement, 'Limpey,'" says Flash.

"Go ahead," says the other fellow indifferent-like. "Killing ain't nothing to fear."

"I didn't come to kill," says Limpy. "I'm out of shells."

"No shell," says Bull. "Nobody she's got any, Limpy."

"Except the strangers," says Solemn. "Daw-w-w-w-w—gone!"

"We runs out of cartridges; so we abdicates," explains Limpy. "Somebody has been whanging lead into the front of my place for ten minutes. Somebody has sneaked out into the rocks and is bombarding my place with a big rifle, and we stayed as long as possible. All I ask is a——"

Zowie!

The place shudders like it had hit zero without clothes, and the shudder seems to say, "Gents, be seated!"

Some took seats—others stood on the back of their necks. Then comes sort of a swishing noise, and I gets a glimpse of everything coming in and nothing going out. Something seems to lean against me at about forty miles per hour, and the next thing I know I'm out in the street walking circles. I manages to slow down after a while, and somebody bumps into me.

"Ex-cuse me," says Dirty, taking off his hat. "Dice nay."

"How many?" pants a voice, and Tombstone is with us. He points at the store and does sort of a joyful shuffle. "How many passed out?"

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"Two," says I. "Me and Dirty Shirt Jones."

"How many died?" he whispers.

We looks over at the store to sort of make a rough estimate, and them shocked gamblers begin to come out of there, two by two like the animals out of the ark. They're all able to walk, but none of 'em seems to have sense enough to stop or know where they're headed for.

Flash and Snap walked right off the end of Broadway, locked in each other's arms. Later we seen 'em far down the trail, limping away like two lost souls hunting for peace. Limpy and Bull tried to get into the remnants of the King of Clubs but bumped into the rock and sat down.

One couple got headed right and poked into the Ten of Hearts, and the rest, like a herd of sheep, follered in their footsteps. Then comes Solemn, all alone, walking like a man who sees far beyond the present writing. He acts like he was taking us into a great secret, when he limps up to us and whispers—

"The Queen of Spades is no more!"

"No more than the two saloons that went before," agrees Dirty.

"Daw-w-w-w-w—gone! That's true. I wonders why them palaces of vice arise on the wings of the morning, gents? If this keeps up, we're lost!"

"Is anybody here worth saving?" I asks, and Solemn shakes his head.

"Not even us, I reckon. Let's see if there's an unbroken drink in the Ten of Hearts."

Tombstone went with us, and the four of us invades that place, where we finds what is left of Horse Heaven, leaning on the furniture. The windows of the place are all busted, and glass is over everything. A roulette wheel is hanging to a busted chandelier, and the bar mirror looks like some hard-rock miners had been testing their powder on it.

"The guilty party or parties must be among us," states a long-mustached *hombre* judicial-like. "It ain't noways possible that them places went up by spontaneous combustion."

"They was mean enough to bust," states another voice, and a feller from the Ace of Diamonds steps out and reaches for his gun.

"If meanness busts 'em, this dump wouldn't stay put long enough to move in the furniture!" he yelps, and there comes two clicks.

"Daw-w-w-w-w—gone!" grunts Solemn. "You Ten of Hearters out of shells, too?"

"Is everybody?" asks the long-mustached *hombre*.

"All but the strangers."

Dirty Shirt pounds on the bar with his gun and squints around at that bunch of blank expressions.

"Gents, I wish an explanation," says Dirty. "Among you is a natural born anarchist who deserves punishment or a medal, and right now we holds court to discover said person or persons."

"I'll be the judge," says the judicial *hombre*. "I used to be a lawyer."

"You must 'a been mighty young," states a voice. "I've knowed you for twenty years, and during that time you ain't done nothing but steal cows."

"I'll be the judge," says Dirty Shirt, "and Ike Harper will be the jury. *Sabe?*"

He stands 'em all up against the wall and then sets down on a table.

"Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye! This court is doing business."

"I'll prosecute," suggests the ex-lawyer.

"You'll defend—yourself!" yelps Dirty. "Guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty—dang you!"

"He's likely lying," says a *hombre* from the Queen of Spades.

"Jury, you have the evidence," says Dirty. "What's the verdict?"

"Likely," says I, and Dirty nods.

"Sentenced to walk the plank."

"Walk the plank?" yelps the prisoner. "What do you mean, feller?"

"Judge!" snaps Dirty, covering him. "Don't you call me 'feller'!"

"All right—Judge!"

"I mean," says Dirty wise-like, "I mean that I'm going to set a precedent for coming pirates to shoot at. Instead of walking 'em off a plank into soft water, I'm going to have 'em led to the end of Broadway and kicked off the edge. *Sabe!*"

"That ain't justice!" yells a Ten of Hearts gambler indignant-like. "If we had a shell left——"

"Two to go, Ike," says Dirty. "Same charge and same sentence."

"I'd admire to be a helper," says a feller from the King of Clubs. "I sure can kick."

"I asks for the job through mercenary

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motives," says another, and I appoints 'em both on the spot.

We prods them two protesters to the edge of the avenue, and I sets down on a rock and sees the sentence of the law carried out. Them two hits the downward trail and don't even look back.

Dirty is setting in state, fondling his gun, when we show up.

"Somebody has turned State's evidence against your helpers while you was out," says he. "Same sentence, same place and harder if anything."

MY ASSISTANTS howled at the top of their voices, but I took two joyful crap-shooters from the Queen of Spades as my assistants, and my prisoners bowed their heads to the inevitable.

As we starts out of the door, a hunk of lead lifts splinters out from under our feet, and we goes up high.

"Somebody bushwhacking the courthouse," says Dirty. "Go ahead and dispose of that batch, Ike."

That bushwhacker was too promiscuous, if anybody asks me. Three times during that trip we got shot at. Them prisoners acts mean-like at the gallows, but they ain't got no visible means of defense; so they follers the lead of the men they kicked over.

A bullet enters the door with us and rips the green cloth on the judge's table, and from far away comes the whang of that danged rifle.

"She's Beel La Fond," says Bull, who has managed to make his way into the place. "Dat's my .50-110. What for she's shoot all time? I'm weesh I have my powdair back—ba gar!"

"The law is too slow, Dirty," says I. "Pretty soon that fool Frenchman will get the elevation right and hurt somebody. Can't you sort of lump the cases and have it over with?"

"Thanks, Ike," and he stands up. "Guilty or not guilty? Nobody says a word; so silence must give consent."

"Who you trying?" asks Solemn.

"All but you and Bull and Tombstone," says Dirty. "We know that you are innocent; so we hires you to do the kicking. *Sabe?*"

"Daw-w-w-w-w—gone!"

"Me, I'm got friends in there," says Bull. "You hire somebody else."

"Well," says Dirty, "you can trade places with one of your friends, Bull."

"*Non*," says Bull sad-like. "She's so long as she is wide."

Thereupon me and Dirty has to back against the wall and almost kill somebody. The remaining members of that ill-fated village gets peevish and cross, but a six-gun is a hi-yu argument, and we shows 'em the error of their ways.

Bull can kick. He picks out his victims, and I'd tell a man that none of them can claim friendship with that big Frenchman. Tombstone is too small to be of much assistance, and Solemn is too sad. Me and Dirty sets there and watches them crooked gamblers and gunmen hit the slide down Broadway, pick themselves up and pilgrim along down the trail, and our system gets bathed in the most beautiful flood of profanity I ever heard.

Then the four of us went back to the Ten of Hearts to wash the taste out of our mouths. A bullet wanders in and busts up our party, but we sets down behind the remains of the bar.

"Dem bullet she's exploder kind," explains Bull, when one of 'em bumps into the steps. "Beel La Fond, she's tak' all my shell, and she don't pay me for dem five boxes powdair. She's tak' my rifle too. Dem is bad gun—ba gar! Shoot deer—*bam!* Bullet she's bus' and deer lose all her wind."

We listens to another bullet bust into the place.

"Poetry, she's sore at Horse Heaven," explains Bull. "She's make beeg money in Hondo Creek, and den she's play here. Tinhorn she's lay for heem, and he lose it all. She's say de wheel in de Queen of Spades is crook; she's say crooked dealer in Ace of Diamonds; she's say cold deck in King of Clubs; she's say—too much. *Sabe?*

"Tinhorns put tar on Poetry, put on plenty feather and den say: *'Whooee!* Fly away, beeg bird!' "

Bull snaps his fingers and takes another drink.

"Den dey keek heem off de rock. Me, I'm t'ink Poetry she's sore."

Me and Dirty gets up and slides toward the front. Makes a feller feel sort of loose inside when he expects an ounce of lead to hive up in him any minute. We peers out.

Another bullet whangs into the porch, and

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off across the gulch we sees two figures on a rock.

"Maybe you drive heem away, eh?" asks Bull.

"At that range?" grunts Dirty, leaning out of the door. "All his shots are low, Ike. Wonder what he's——"

Dirty jumps back inside, whirls around and gallops for the back of the room. Something seems to tell us to foller suit, and the bunch of us hits the door at the same time. It's locked!

We mills for a second, and then the Ten of Hearts seems to hop out from under us. Something seems to play a solo on my eardrums, and I hears a lot of applause. I responds with a polite bow, and just then I discovers that the applause consists of several hundred feet of rough lumber, coming down from above and clattering around me. I walks out of there with a mineral water picture frame around my neck and a limp in both legs.

I WALKS out on Broadway and looks at Horse Heaven. There's only one building intact—the undertaking shop. I sees a figure get up in the street below me, tack back and forth across the street until it comes to the jumping-off place, but it don't jump. Nope; it just leans over and lets gravity take its course. From the contour of the critter I'd opine it to be Tombstone.

While I'm looking things over, I sees a pile of tar-paper arise, and from under it comes Bull and Solemn. They looks around with unseeing eyes and stumbles into the street.

"She's beeg night!" declares Bull. "What you t'ink?"

"Daw-w-w-w—gone!" drawls Solemn. "I'm about half out of work."

"Speaking about powder," says a voice behind us, and there is Dirty Shirt.

His shirt has been blowed plumb up around his neck, and his pants have been blowed just about as far the other way. He's got a cut over one eye, and the rest of his face looks like it had rooted in a stove.

"Yah!" grunts Bull. "She's tak' away six box powdair, and ——"

"And left one in front of each place!" groans Dirty. "Then he gets back there with that danged rifle and explodes 'em. I seen that box on the porch."

"Daw-w-w-w—gone!" grunts Solemn.

Another bullet rattles off a rock beside us.

"Forward march!" yelps Dirty, tugging at his pants. "You *hombres* want to get killed?"

"Shut up!" snapped Bull belligerent-like. "Maybe you can boss tinhorn, but you can't boss me. Smart, eh?"

He yanks out a gun and points it at us.

"Pirates! Ba gar, I'm pirate you! I take Dirty Shirt's gun in saloon. *Sabe?* Now we see who keek off street, eh, Solemn?"

"Daw-w-w-w—gone!"

"You help me, eh, Solemn?"

"I'll kick," nods Solemn. "Daw-w-w-w—gone!"

I've got my hands up, but Dirty is still trying to get his shirt and pants to meet and ain't acting concerned at all.

"What'll we do, Dirty?" I asks.

"Do?" he grunts. "Shoot the blamed fool, Ike. That gun is empty." Bull snaps that gun all the way around before he gets the idea, and then he swears in French.

"What do you think now, Solemn?" I asks.

"I ain't got no kick coming," says he sad-like. "Daw-w-w-w—gone!"

"What'll we do with 'em, Dirty?" I asks.

"Make 'em walk the plank, Ike."

We flips a coin to see who gets to kick Bull, and I lost. I'm glad. I didn't have much against Solemn Sales, but at that I sprained my ankle a little. Me and Dirty sets down at the top and watches Bull and Solemn pilgrim down the trail. They acts like they was going to stop at Tombstone's place, but all to once they starts limping fast down the trail, and we hears that rifle banging away again.

Then we sees Tombstone lope out of his door and go hippety-hopping off down the trail like a rabbit with sore feet.

"Some—" begins Dirty, and just then we sees the undertaking shop leave its moorings and ride away in a cloud of smoke.

The rocks rain around us, and we seen a casket sail high into the air and crash down below us in the rocks, and something else seems to hit the rocks with a metallic whang. Then the smoke clears away, and Horse Heaven is only a memory.

"That sixth box of powder!" grunts Dirty.

We sets there and smokes for a while and kicks our heels against the ledge.

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"It sure was a real cleaning, Ike," says Dirty. "It sure was."

"It will be," says a voice behind us, and we cranes our necks.

There stands a fat-faced *hombre*, and around his neck is a suspicion of tar, and beside him is a tall, skinny one, with a bushy lot of whiskers on his face.

"Stand up!" snaps the tall feller, pointing his rifle at us, and we follered directions.

"Face down the hill!"

I never will again. His toe caught me right where he intended for it to, and I never stopped skidding until I stops with both feet in that busted casket. Dirty beat me by a nose.

We sets there for a few minutes and waits for the burning sensation to leave, and then Dirty stumbles to his feet. Beside us is that poetry rock.

I think that some day I will come and put you bad-men on the bum: That will be swell. Then me and you, who've stood the shocks and peddled lead from behind rocks and dodged and ducked from morn 'til night and shot at everything in sight, can rise right up amid the dust and make a better town or bust. But 'til I do I'll keep away, and to ye all I hereby say—

Horse Heaven go to ——!

"Very well," says Dirty feelingly, and then he stoops over and picks up that metallic object out of the boulders and stands it up on top of the rock. It is a casket epitaph and reads—

GONE HENCE

We looks back at the top of the hill, and there sets them two *hombres*, like a pair of buzzards. We waves at 'em and pilgrims on.

"Some day, Ike!" grunts Dirty. "Some day! Making them *hombres* walk the plank was the best job a pair of pirates ever done. Me and you got there at the right time, Ike. Suppose we'd got there on a day when there was plenty of shells?"

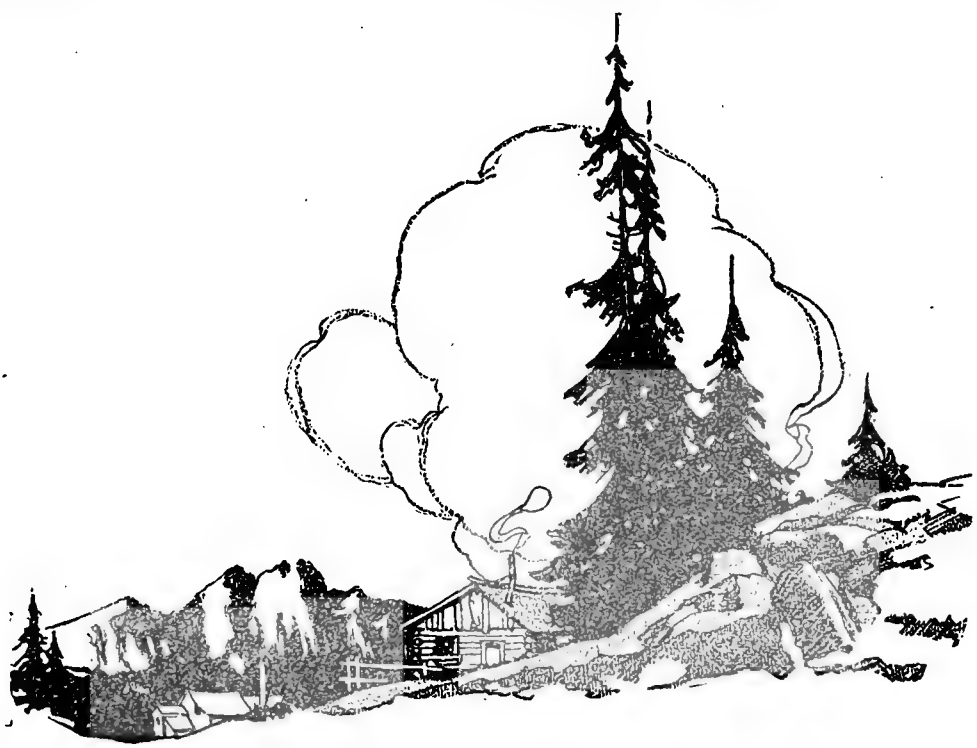
"Speaking of shells," says I. "Reminds me of your empty gun."

"Nerve, Ike," he grins. "Ha, ha, ha! Me passing out judgment with an empty gun, but I knowed I could depend on you, old-timer."

"For what, Dirty?" I asks.

"What for?" he yells. "Why—well, my gun was empty, wasn't it?"

"You don't need to yell at me, Dirty Shirt," says I. "I ain't hard of hearing. Mine was empty, too."



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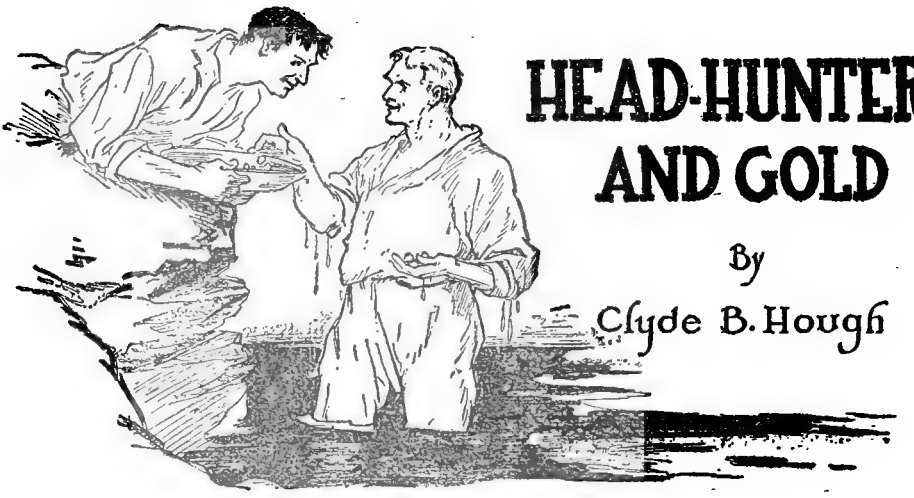

HEAD-HUNTERS AND GOLD

By Clyde B. Hough

Author of "Rescued," "An Hour," etc.

FRED WALTON was sprawled out on the mountainside, pulling at an age-blackened briar pipe. Across the cook-fire from Walton, his partner, Harry Thomas, leaned back against the trunk of a sapanwood tree and reflectively polished the butt of a long, blue revolver.

The Philippine portion of earth had just turned out of the play of the sun, and evening shadows were merging into darkness, while daylight was drifting westward over the China Sea.

Above the two men, for a thousand feet, rose the crowning peak of Mt. Amuyao, and a few yards below them, running south, was a narrow, turbulent stream. In the bank of the stream, and just above the waterline, there was a small, crude tunnel, barely large enough for a man to kneel in and use a short-handled pick. Out of the dirt taken from this hole in the bank Thomas and Walton managed, each day, to "pan" a discouragingly small amount of gold dust and once in a while a fairly respectable nugget.

Below the gold claim, and below the stream, Mt. Amuyao stretched away to the westward—sloped down by stages of foot-hills and "nigger-heads" till it reached the low land, and this, in turn, spread out, to the ocean beach and Vigan, where the partners had rounded out their terms of enlistment in the Army and received their discharges three months before.

As Thomas finished with his revolver and the last fading light trembled on the rim of darkness, Walton suddenly sat bolt upright.

"Did you see that?" he asked in a low, guarded voice.

"See what?" inquired the other.

"A buck Igorrote just pushed his ugly face through them bushes below the shaft there, and he was shaved clean for two inches above the ears, and the rest of his hair was tufted up on the crown of his head. Know what that means, don't you? Banaue head-hunter."

"Well," said Thomas, "I know you've not been drinking lately, and I'd hate to see you go loco in the head, but I shore do hope you're seein' things. We don't want any social minglin's with them dog-eatin' subjects of old Cabagan's."

Walton drew his revolver, threw the cylinder over and examined the cartridges.

"I'm mighty 'fraid we're goin' to have a call," he said. "I guess these Banaues are worse than we thought. When I was over at Bontoc today for the dynamite, the old Spaniard who runs the store over there was tellin' me that we're takin' big chances, workin' here. He says the Banaues are plumb devils and never let a chance to grab a head pass. Most of the other tribes, you know, only go after heads when the fire-tree's in bloom. But, accordin' to the Spaniard, Cabagan's tribe are at it the year round. And he says——"

"Say," interrupted Thomas, "is that the reason you buried the dynamite?"

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"Why—er—I didn't put no stock in what the Spaniard said—that is, I'm not worried. But then I thought it might be safer."

"You bet it's safer," answered Thomas. "If they do pay us a call, I wouldn't like to see 'em get hold of the dynamite. They may not know what it is, but that probably wouldn't keep 'em from doin' a lot of damage with it. But go ahead. What else did the Spaniard say?"

"Well he said the tribe was never like this till Cabagan got to be chief. Says the Government tried to make some kind of a treaty with old Cabagan—tried to get him to quit head-huntin'. But they didn't have much luck. In fact, the old devil invited the Government to come up and stop him.

"Then they sent a bunch of troops up and got on his trail, but he shook 'em clean. And they've tried it three different times, and he loses 'em every time. The Spaniard also says that Cabagan is very rich—says the chief is crazy for cheap trinkets—beads and things. Buys loads of 'em and pays with gold nuggets."

"Pays with nuggets, eh?" mused Thomas. "Well that's some consolation anyhow; it shows that there's more gold in this section than anywhere else we've worked so far. And the Lord knows we've washed stream beds and tunneled in banks enough."

Here the conversation was interrupted by a slight noise in the bushes above. Thomas rose and kicked the remainder of their cook-fire into the stream below.

"It's dark now," he explained, "and the light had us at a disadvantage."

"Guess the one that I saw a bit ago was a scout," said Walton. "He probably went back and got his friends."

There was another rustle in the bushes off to one side, and Walton, who was getting a little nervous, drew his revolver and fired at the noise. The sound had the effect of a man coming upon a covey of quail. Head-hunters sprang up on all sides. They seemed literally to have risen out of the bare lava. There was a swift, furious rush toward one common center—the two white men.

THE Igorrotes had no firearms. There were several shots in rapid succession from the revolvers of Thomas and Walton. Two or three Banaues dropped, and that was all.

The head-hunters had swarmed upon the partners like bees "pitching" on a limb, and the white men were literally smothered under black forms. Their revolvers were snatched away, and their hands bound behind them with coarse grass rope. Then they were led south, along the upper bank of the stream.

The Banaues wore an unusually large number of cheap gewgaws, painted glass beads, brass earrings and thin clasps of brass around their biceps. They seemed to be returning from a pilgrimage to the northward. However, they had not been on a head-hunt. At least, they had no heads in their possession. But one of the tribe was leading seven well-fed dogs, all of them made fast to one rope.

Evidently they had traded something—pigs perhaps—with some other tribe for the dogs. The head-hunters followed the stream in single file, their two white captives in the center. The full, round, tropic moon pushed up above the mountain peak and bathed the brown lava and scattered shrubbery in a flood of soft, white light. Thomas and Walton did not talk, but each knew that the other was thinking hard.

After a distance of perhaps two miles had been covered, the stream flowed square up against a ridge-like shoulder of the mountain, which rose several hundred feet high and pointed due west at right-angles to the mountain itself. Here the stream, perforce, changed its course from south to west and flowed directly toward the sea along the north side of the out-jutting ridge. A little farther down the mountainside there was a precipice—an abrupt drop of some twenty feet.

The natives moved a bit away from the bank of the stream and climbed down, taking their captives with them. The white men stumbled and tripped and, because they could not use their hands, almost fell a number of times. But the Banaues held them up, and at last they reached the bottom of the precipice. Then they saw the waterfall. It was a roaring, tumbling column at the middle but widened out to a thin, foamy curtain on each side.

"I remember this place," Thomas whispered to his partner. "Mind we filled our canteens at the fall and washed our faces and hands a little down-stream there.

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That was the same day we started prospectin' back yonder."

"Shore 'nough, we did," answered Walton.

Then the head-hunter in the lead passed around one side of the foaming white curtain and out of sight. The others followed, and soon Thomas and Walton found themselves in a cavern that was about the size and depth of a large room and which was roofed by a shelving ledge of lava.

This much could be dimly discerned by the light which drifted in at either side of the waterfall. But the natives did not stop; they kept moving, kept disappearing into utter darkness, and as the line disappeared Thomas and Walton, following in their turn, entered the mouth of a narrow tunnel and understood.

Sometimes the tunnel became so narrow that the men had to turn sideways lest their shoulders wedge between the walls. At other times they were forced to bend and twist their bodies, accommodate their postures to leaning, irregular angles. Their hands were tied, and it was difficult for them to keep their feet on the uneven floor; so the natives immediately in front of and behind each supported them.

Once they came to a sheer drop of five or six feet in the floor of the tunnel. Here they were lifted bodily by the head-hunters, who found no difficulty in making their way along. In fact they were as familiar here as a white man is on his own stairway.

At last the narrow tunnel broadened into a big passage with a score or more of small, stall-like caves ranged along on either side. The big passage and some of the caves were lighted by glass lamps which burned coconut oil and threw dull patches of yellow light against the dun walls. And, being underground, the place was naturally cool. But what puzzled the white men was the air; there was a strong current of outside air flowing through all the time. The place was swarming with men, women and children, going to and fro like ants in a hill, and, like those who had brought the white men here, they all wore cheap jewelry.

"Say, Harry," asked Walton, "do you suppose Cabagan sells all these beads and brass things to his tribe? You know the Spaniard says he buys a lot of the stuff."

"I can't dope it out," said Thomas, "but there's somethin' here that's out of the ordinary. This wholesale head-huntin' and all this junk that Cabagan buys with gold nuggets—I'm tellin' you there's some reason behind it."

It was at this time that a Banaue came and led the partners farther down the big passage, and, as they followed their guard along, they passed a number of cook-fires—seven, to be exact—and over each fire, hanging from a wooden spit, there was a roasting carcass—the seven dogs that Thomas and Walton had seen the Banaues leading by one rope.

A LITTLE beyond the fires Thomas and Walton glanced into a dimly lighted cave and had a vivid picture of the probable fate in store for themselves. They saw human heads! Shriveled, smoke-dried heads, hanging from bamboo poles at the roof of the cave—rows and rows of them—the accumulation of the tribe for generations past.

The white men stopped and gazed for a minute, fascinated by the horrible scene. Then their captors hustled them on, and soon they came to the largest and best lighted cave they had yet seen. This was the cave of Cabagan, and the chief was there, sitting on a dais constructed of hand-polished ironwood and canopied with some gaudy colored cloth.

He was muscled and thewed like an Oriental athlete. On one of his brown cheeks, tattooed in blue ink, were five crosses—simple announcement, to those who understood, that he had taken five heads.

Cabagan's ears were hung with heavy, double-coiled earrings of hand-beaten gold; and below the knees, so tight that they pressed into the flesh, he wore spiral circles of the same precious metal. No cheap jewelry here. His eyes were small, sinister, black and expressionless, like beads of jet. For several minutes he scrutinized the two men intently; then he uttered a few sharp sentences, and they were led away. Neither Thomas nor Walton could understand the Banaue dialect; so they had no idea what Cabagan's instructions had been.

Back the way they had come the big passage was now lined on both sides with squatting Banaues, every one of them tearing and pulling at some portion of a roasted dog. The feast had begun.

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Beyond the lines of squatting Banaues the guard stopped in front of a small, dark cave and motioned for the white men to enter. At the back of the cave they stumbled over a pile of dry grass and sat down on it, their hands still tied behind them.

But they had been there only a few minutes when their guard came with a lamp and more rope. This time he tied their legs, as well as their hands, winding and crossing the rope time after time and tying and retying it until there seemed not the remotest possibility of the partners getting loose.

The head-hunter was in a vicious mood—no doubt because he was being kept away from the dog feast—and he was merciless in drawing his loops and tightening his knots. But at last the work was done and the savage went out, taking the lamp with him.

A few minutes later the men saw another Banaue, a stocky-muscled, breech-clouted fellow, armed with a spear, walking up and down in front of their prison.

"What do you think of our chances?" asked Walton, after the Banaue had left the cave.

"Looks pretty serious," answered Thomas, "but I think we're safe for the night. They wouldn't hold up that dog feast for anything on earth—not even to chop off a white man's head. But, if we're still here in the mornin', I'm 'fraid it'll be all off.

"This Cabagan is a bad one, and his head-huntin' is not ordinary. In the first place, he's no Banaue. You can tell that by the look of him, a rusty brown, big chest, long arms and long legs. Banaues are pretty near black and they got short arms and short legs. Never was a Banaue as big as Cabagan. He's a Quianganee, and the Quianganees never hunt heads, not even when the fire-tree's in bloom.

"I don't understand it; but I'm tellin' you this Quianganee has worked himself in here to be the chief of the Banaues for some particular reason, and he's encouragin' this continual head-huntin' for that same reason. But the thing for us right now is to work on the ropes—try to get 'em loose."

"For my part," said Walton dejectedly, "I can't do anything. My palms are clamped together like two mussel shells—can't even move my fingers."

"I'm in the same fix," answered Thomas. "But, Fred—cheer up—they left our jaws free to work. Now you turn on your belly, and I'll employ my teeth on them knots over your hands."

At first Thomas tried to work the knots loose with his teeth, but, being unable to see on account of the intense darkness, he tightened as often as he loosened them; so he gave up the idea of untying the knots and began gnawing the rope. It was slow, painful work, and the tough dry grass of which the rope was made cut the white man's gums and lips till they bled; he knew they bled because he could taste salt. Still he kept at it, minute by minute, hour by hour, gnawing the grass rope, the spaces between his teeth filled with tiny strips of grass as if he were a horse feeding at a hay-rack.

About two o'clock in the morning Thomas had his partner's hands free, and after that the ropes fell away fast, and soon both men stood up and stretched free limbs. Then, flattened like bats, clinging like leeches and moving like snails, the two men hugged the cave wall and worked toward the big passage.

They moved with infinite care, taking minutes instead of seconds for each deliberate advance of hand or foot. Then at last they reached the passage and heard heavy breathing near at hand—the sentry, meat-gorged and undangerous for hours to come.

The lamps were extinguished now, the fires ashen gray heaps, and all was pitch-dark blackness—save for a thin blade of moonlight here and there which shone through an occasional crevice overhead.

"Must be two entrances to this place," breathed Walton, close to his partner's ear. "That's moonlight ahead yonder, and you couldn't see moonlight from that hole behind the waterfall."

"Tunnel most likely runs clear through this hunk of mountain above us," answered Thomas. "Come to think of it, that's how they get their fresh air. But let's make for that patch of light; it means outside."

DOWN on hands and knees, shoulder touching shoulder, the partners moved by infinite fractions of inches. On each side, all along the way, they heard heavy snoring and bestial

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groans, but the passageway was clear of sleeping forms.

At the end they saw a sentinel, and, unlike the other, he was not sleeping. Apparently he was the only man of all the tribe who was awake. He was leaning against the tunnel wall, in the very entrance, looking outward, and only one shoulder, one ear and a bit of side-face showed clear against the moonlight.

The rest of him was blanketed in darkness—the shadow of the wall. They were close now—two feet. Thomas straightened up without a sound. His whole weight was behind the clenched fist. The crash of bare knuckles against flesh and bone just beneath the ear was not loud. Walton, crouching, caught the inert form and saved a heavy thud. They took the head-hunter with them. He was safer that way.

When the men reached the outside they found no waterfall. It was as Thomas had thought: the tunnel ran through, and they were on the southern side of this shoulder of the mountain. They were barely clear of the tunnel entrance when the head-hunter gave signs of returning consciousness. Thomas quickly made a gag of his handkerchief, and Walton stripped off his leather belt and tied the Banaue's hands behind him. Then they started north up and across the ridge whereunder slept the Banaues in their caves.

"What'll we do?" asked Walton of his partner. "Head for Vigan and get soldiers?"

"Hardly," said Thomas. "You shore don't think they'd lie in them caves and wait for us to bring the troops, do you?"

"What's the plan, then?"

"We got thirty-six sticks of dynamite buried over there, ain't we?"

"Shore."

"It's eighty per cent. stuff, ain't it?"

"That's what it is."

"Well, you have an idea what eighteen sticks placed with a little judgment would do in each end of that tunnel, don't you?"

The native stumbled and half fell, and Walton, who was holding on to the strap about the fellow's wrists, jerked him up, then stopped and looked at his partner in the moonlight.

"All right," said Walton. "You set the pace, and I'll see that our little brother here comes second."

Thomas set the pace, and it was a cruel one—it had to be. The head-hunters were meat-heavy and sleeping hard, but daylight was almost sure to find some of them awake. The dynamite was at least two and a half miles away—five miles to cover before dawn, in less than three hours.

Walton walked behind his captive, always holding him by the bound wrists and prodding him on. It took considerable persuasion to keep the Banaue at Thomas' heels, and Walton's persuasion was more convincing than tender, but it was undeniably effective.

They went over the ridge, down the northern side, picked up the stream above the waterfall and hurried on to their camp. The case containing the thirty-six sticks of eighty per cent. dynamite was just as Walton had planted it. They gathered up several pieces of rope which had been used on their packs and with these tied the head-hunter, still gagged, in a place where he would not be found at least for some hours.

Then the men took eighteen sticks of dynamite apiece, and each hung a coil of fuse over his shoulder, and they went downstream.

"You go on over, Fred," said Thomas to his partner, when they arrived at the waterfall, "and place your shots, six on each side and six on top. It'll be funny if that don't seal 'em up. Cut your fuses all the same length and touch 'em all off at once. I'll plant my shots and wait till I hear yours. If I cut my fuses pretty short, they'll burn down before Cabagan's gang can get up to this end."

WALTON went back over the ridge, and Thomas went behind the waterfall, made three shallow trenches, laid his dynamite and cut the fuses. A long time he held the three ends together in one hand, a match in the other, ready, his ears strained for the roar of Walton's explosion.

At last it came, a muffled rumble, drifting up through the tunnel. Then Walton struck his match, touched it to the three fuses and ran out through the falling water. He was barely clear when the whole overhanging ledge raised like a thing alive. There was a deep boom in the hollow underneath; then continuous graduations of receding sound, and the lava ledge which had caused the waterfall settled back and

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crushed down to the floor of the cavern.

The waterfall was no more. Now the stream flowed down an uneven slope, and the tunnel mouth was jammed and clogged with tons and tons of shattered lava.

Walton came to Thomas where the waterfall had been. A pink wave was spreading in the east.

"O K?" asked Thomas.

"Far as I can tell," answered Walton. "Caved in big from both sides and the top. I looked it over and couldn't find even a crevice. Think they'll make out for air, Harry?"

"Shore. 'Member them little seams overhead, where we saw the narrow blades of moonlight? They'll get enough air that way. Now for Vigan and the soldiers to come and take 'em out."

The partners were tired when they tramped into Vigan late that afternoon. They went directly to the commanding officer and made a complete report.

It was Company "H" that was detailed to go up and bring back the head-hunters. The company started at daylight the next morning with Thomas and Walton to guide them and, by a forced march, arrived at the northern end of the closed tunnel about mid-afternoon.

It required picks, shovels, crowbars and an hour's hard work to open the entrance that Thomas had sealed in less than a minute.

There was not a sound within when the tunnel mouth was finally cleared, but, when they shouted down the passage, the answers were instant, numerous and tumultuous. The soldiers stood by with their rifles and allowed the head-hunters to climb out over the débris, one by one.

They were divided into groups and given to squads to be guarded as they came out, all but Cabagan. He was bound and handed over to the keeping of two corporals.

By the time the last Banaue was out, the column, with its prisoners, was formed and ready to march.

Thomas and Walton were the last to leave the tunnel, and, as they crossed the stream, Thomas, talking with Walton, made a slight misstep. His foot went over the edge of the rock he had intended to step on, and he landed waist deep in the basin-like pool, which had been worn by the continual falling of water over the recent cascade.

For a moment Thomas slipped and slid about like a man trying to stand up in a bin of marbles. The bottom of the pool was evidently covered with small pebbles. Walton, laughing, held out a hand to his partner; the latter grasped it and scrambled out of the water.

Thomas felt something in his shoe and squeezed his forefinger in beside the ankle and hooked the something out. It was extra heavy for a pebble. Thomas looked at it and, for a moment, lost his power to speak. He merely turned and held it out on his open palm to Walton.

It was the size of a hickory nut—a pitted and dented gold nugget, worn bright from contact and friction. Walton grabbed it, hefted it, dropped it back on his partner's palm and jumped into the pool. He reached down and scooped up a double handful of nuggets. It was as if his hands were full of broken pretzels and half-cracked nuts.

"Man," he said, his voice hoarse, "the place is full of 'em."

Thomas shaded his eyes with his hand and looked down the mountainside. Company "H," stretched out in column of fours, was winding and twisting its way down toward Vigan. Thomas turned and entered the tunnel.

After a few minutes he came back with two round trays. They had each been dug out of solid wood and one was small—held perhaps a gallon, while the other was large—about the size of a half-bushel measure. The Banaues had probably used them for winnowing and measuring rice.

Again and again Walton filled the small tray with nuggets and passed it up to Thomas, who dumped the nuggets into the large tray, which he had placed on the bank of the stream. For half an hour they worked, frantic, too tense for speech. Then Walton went over the whole interior of the pool, feeling every hole and rift with fingers that bled.

"That's all," he said at last, with a sigh that meant relaxation.

The large wooden tray was heaped with nuggets.

"I'll bet it took hundreds of years for all them nuggets to get washed down here in the pool," mused Walton, his eyes beaming on the gold.

"Washed down, nothin'," said Thomas. "Cabagan put them nuggets there. I

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understand it all now. This Quianganee went out and got himself five heads. That put him right with the Banaues. Then he put them five crosses on his cheek, and the tribe made him chief.

"Then, bein' chief, he was able to push along the head-huntin' game, which kept everybody scared out of these parts, and, havin' the field all alone, he bought a lot of cheap trinkets and traded 'em to the Banaues for gold nuggets, which they dug up here and there, a few at a time but which made quite a lot all together."

"The next thing needed was a safe place to keep the gold. So Cabagan had a look around and decided on the pool. And it was shore some safe deposit vault before I blowed up that lava ledge. Right under the middle of the waterfall where nobody would ever walk; the water beat down too heavy. Also the pool was white with foam all the time, which kept any one from seein' the nuggets.

"And just think, Fred, every time Cabagan'd sneak out there behind the waterfall and dump a few nuggets in the pool he was doin' it for us."

"Well, it's a nice little pile," said Walton, straining as he barely lifted the tray clear of the ground. "There's all of two hundred pounds here—somethin' over forty thousand dollars."

OUT OF THE STORM

(A sea chantey to be sung at the halyards)

By HARRY KEMP

OH, WHAT was it brought us out of the storm when sea on sea ran high
Each like a heaving mountain-top that slanted up the sky,
(Yo ho, and blow 'er down!)
When the sails were slashed and torn to rags and soared off into space,
And the lashing spindrift smote us keen, like whipcords in the face?
(Yo ho, and blow 'er down!)
Oh, our arms were strong—but the wind was strong as a mad unbroken horse,
And the power of men is weak beside the winds' and the waves' wild force.
(Yo ho, and blow 'er down!)
The captain thought of his new-made bride as he held head down through the sea,
And the mate remembered a year-old son to dandle on his knee,
(Yo ho, and blow 'er down!)
And Bill, the Cockney, dreamed of Nell, with her last scrawl in his pocket,
And Frenchie looked at a dark-eyed girl that he kept in a sort of locket,
(Yo ho, and blow 'er down!)
And I, I held a hope in my soul that I might win her still,
The little girl that drove me to sea because of her froward will.
(Yo ho, and blow 'er down!)
So we stuck to the ship as she heeled and dove and righted herself again,
And it was the girls and wives we loved that saved us sailor-men!
(Yo ho, and blow 'er down!)

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RED BELTS

A TWO-PART STORY

PART ONE

By HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "Go-Ahead Davie," "Carson of Taos," etc.

FOREWORD

IN 1784 North Carolina's share of the national debt was a ninth, or about five millions of dollars—a prodigious sum for a commonwealth just emerging from a colonial chrysalis to raise. Yet North Carolina was more fortunate than some of her sister débutantes into Statehood, in that she possessed some twenty-nine million acres of virgin country beyond the Alleghanies. This noble realm, from which the State of Tennessee was to be fashioned, had been won by confiscation and the rifles of the over-mountain settlers and had cost North Carolina neither blood nor money.

The republic was too young to have developed coalescence. A man might be a New Yorker, a New Englander, a Virginian and so on, but as yet seldom an American. The majority of the Northern representatives to the national Congress believed the Union was full grown, geographically; that it covered too much territory already. To all such narrow visions the Alleghanies appealed as being the natural western boundary. These conservatives insisted the future of the country was to be found on the seaboard.

Charles III of Spain heartily approved of this policy of restriction and set in motion his mighty machinery to prevent further expansion of the United States. He knew the stimuli for restoring his kingdom to a world plane could be found only in his American possessions.

As a result those sturdy adventurers crossing the mountains to plunge into the unknown carried with them scant encouragement from their home States or the central Government. In truth, the national Congress was quite powerless to protect its citizens. And this, perhaps, because the new States had not yet fully evolved above the plane of Colonial kinship. It was to be many years before the rights of States gave way to the rights of the nation. The States were often at odds with one another and would stand shoulder to shoulder only in face of a general and overwhelming peril.

Spain, powerful, rapacious and cunning, stalked its prey beyond the mountains. She dreamed of a new world empire, with the capital at New Orleans, and her ambitions formed a somber back-curtain before which Creek and Cherokee warriors —some twenty thousand fighting men— maneuvered to stop the white settlers straggling over the Alleghanies. These logical enemies of the newcomers were augmented by white renegades, a general miscellany of outlaws, who took toll in blood and treasure with a ferocity that had nothing to learn from the red men.

So the over-mountain men had at their backs the indifference of the seaboard.

Confronting them were ambuscades and torture. But there was one factor which

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all the onslaughts of insidious intrigue and bloody violence could not eliminate from the equation—the spirit of the people. The soul of the freeman could not be bought with foreign gold or consumed at the stake. Men died back on the seaboard, and their deaths had only a biological significance, but men were dying over the mountains whose deaths will exert an influence for human betterment so long as these United States of America shall exist.

The fires of suffering, kindled on the western slopes of the Alleghanies to sweep after the sun, contained the alchemy of the spiritual and were to burn out the dross. From their clean ashes a national spirit was to spring up, the harbinger of a mighty people following a flag of many stars, another incontestable proof that materiality can never satisfy the soul of man.

CHAPTER I

FROM OVER THE MOUNTAINS

WITH its sixty cabins and new log court-house Jonesboro was the metropolis of the Watauga country. The settlers on the Holston and Nolichucky as a rule lived on isolated farms, often entirely surrounded by the mighty forest. Outside the tiny communities along these three rivers the Western country was held by red men, wild beasts and beastly white renegades. There were no printing-presses, and it required thirty days for a backwoods horseman, familiar with the difficult mountain trails, to make the State capital five hundred miles away.

The Watauga region contained reckless and lawless men, and anarchy would have reigned if not for the summary justice occasionally worked by the backwoods tribunals. North Carolina did not seem vitally concerned about her children over the mountains. Perhaps "step-children" would more nearly describe the relationship, with the mother State playing the rôle of an indifferent dame.

On a July morning in 1784 the usual bustle and indolence of Jonesboro were in evidence. Men came and went in their linsey trousers and buckskin hunting-shirts, some for the fields, some for the chase. A group of idlers, scorning toil, lounged before the long log tavern kept by Polcher, quarter-blood Cherokee and whispered to be an agent of the great Creek chief, McGillivray.

The loungers were orderly enough, as a rule, almost secretive in their bearing. Plotting mischief to be carried out under the protection of night, honest men said. Polcher seemed to have complete control of this class, and more than one seriously minded settler in passing scowled blackly at the silent group.

On this particular morning, however, Lon Hester was disturbing the sinister quiet of the tavern with his boisterous manners and veiled prophecies. He held an unsavory reputation for being strangely welcome among hostile Cherokees, even free to come and go among the "Chickamaugas"—renegade Cherokees, who under Dragging Canoe had withdrawn to the lower Tennessee to wage implacable war against the whites.

Polcher followed him anxiously from bar to door and back again, endeavoring to confine his loose tongue to eulogies on the rye whisky and the peach and apple brandy. The other habitues saw the tavern-keeper was deeply worried at Hester's babblings, yet he seemed to lack the courage to exert any radical restraint.

"Got Polcher all fussed up," whispered one with a broad grin.

"He carries it too far," growled another.

Hester, reckless from drink, sensed his host's uneasiness and took malicious delight in increasing it. Each time he came to the door and Polcher followed at his heels, his hands twisting nervously in the folds of his soiled apron, he would wink knowingly at his mates and say enough to cause the tavern-keeper to tremble with apprehension.

This baiting of the publican continued for nearly an hour, and then Hester's drunken humor took a new slant. Reaching the door, he wheeled on Polcher and viciously demanded:

"What ye trailin' me for? Think I'm only seven years old? Or be ye 'fraid ye won't git yer pay?"

"Now, now, Lon! Is that the way to talk to your old friend?" soothed Polcher, fluttering a hand down the other's sleeve. "There's some fried chicken and some bear meat inside, all steaming hot and waiting for you." Then, dropping his voice and attempting to placate the perverse

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temper of the man by adopting a confidential tone, he whispered, "And there's things only you and me ought to talk about. You haven't reported a word yet of all that Red Hajason must have said."

With a raucous laugh Hester openly jeered him, crying:

"It's ye'n me, eh? When I quit here, it was 'Ye do this' an' 'Ye do that.' Now we must keep things away from the boys, eh? ——! When I git ready to talk to ye, I'll let ye know. An', when I bring my talk to ye, mebbe it won't be me that'll be takin' the orders."

"I've got some old apple brandy you never tasted," murmured Polcher, trying to decoy him inside.

"Ye're a master hand to keep things to yerself," retorted Hester, readjusting a long feather in his hat. "But mebbe, now I've made this last trip, the brandy will be 'bout the only thing ye can hoot 'bout as bein' all yer own."

Several of the group grinned broadly, finding only enjoyment in the scene.

The majority, however, eyed the reckless speaker askance. They knew his runaway tongue might easily involve them all in a most unwholesome fashion. Polcher's saturnine face suddenly became all Indian in its malevolent expression, but by a mighty effort he controlled himself and turned back into the tavern.

Hester glanced after him and laughed sneeringly. As he missed the expected applause from his mates, his mirth vanished, and dull rage filled his bloodshot eyes as he stared at the silent men and saw by their downcast gaze that he was rebuked. Standing with hands on his hips, he wagged his head until the feather in his hat fell over one ear. In the heraldry of the border the cock's feather advertised his prowess as a man-beater, insignia he would retain until a better man bested him in the rough-and-tumble style of fighting that had left him cock-of-the-walk.

"What's the matter with ye all?" he growled, thrusting out his under lip. "Don't like my talk, eh? Ye're lowin' I oughter be takin' orders from that sand-hiller in there? Well, I reckon I'm 'bout done takin' any lip from him. Ye'll find it's me what will be givin' orders along the Watauga mighty soon if——"

"For Gawd's sake, Lonny, stop!" gasped a white-bearded man.

"Who'll stop me?" roared Hester, leaping from the doorway and catching the speaker by the throat. "Mebbe ye 'low it's ye who'll do the stoppin', Amos Thatch, with yer sly tricks at forest-runnin'. Who ye workin' for, anyhow? Who gives ye orders? —— yer old hide, I reckon ye're tryin' to carry watter on both shoulders."

"Don't, Lonny!" gasped Thatch, but making no effort to escape or resent the cruel clutch on his throat. "Ye're funnin', I know. Ye know I'm workin' same's ye be."

"Workin' same as ye be, eh? Ye old rip! Fiddlin' round in the same class that ye be, eh?"

"Don't choke me! Let's go inside an' have a drink. Too many ears round here. Too near the court-house."

With a wild laugh Hester threw him aside and derisively mocked:

"Too near the court-house, is it? Who cares for the court-house?"

And he grimaced mockingly at the figure of a man busily writing at a rough table by the open window. Then, believing he must justify his display of independence, he turned to the group and with drunken gravity declared:

"The time's past, boys, when we have to hide an' snoop round. There's a big change comin', an' them that's got the nerve will come out on top. The time's past when court-houses can skeer us into walkin' light when we feel like walkin' heavy. I know. I've got news that'll——"

"Now, shut up!" gritted Polcher, darting out the door and whipping a butcher-knife from under his apron. "Another word and I'll slit your throat and be thanked by our masters."

As Hester felt the knife prick the skin over his Adam's apple, his jaw sagged in terror. Sobered by the assault, he realized he had gone too far. Instantly the loungers crowded about him to prevent outsiders from witnessing the tableau. Old Thatch whispered:

"He's dirty drunk. 'Nolichucky Jack' must 'a' heard some of it. I seen him stop writing and cock his ear."

"To —— with Chucky Jack!" Hester feebly defied. "I ain't said nothin'."

"If you had finished what you'd begun, you'd never said anything more," hissed Polcher. "You can drink your skin full every hour in the day, and that's all right.

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But you've got to keep your trap closed. I've tried soft means, and now I'm going to rip your insides out if you don't keep shut."

Hester glanced down at his own bony hands and the long finger-nails, pared to points for the express purpose of scooping out an opponent's eyes, then shifted his gaze to the grim faces of his companions. He read nothing but indorsement for Polcher.

"I can't fight a whole crowd," he jerkily admitted.

"You don't have to fight none of us," warned Polcher, lowering the knife and hiding it under his apron. "All you've got to do is to fight yourself, to keep your tongue from wagging. You say you've brought something. Is it for me?"

"No, it ain't for ye," sullenly retorted Hester, his small eyes glowing murderously.

"Then keep it for the right man. Don't go to peddling it to Chucky Jack and all his friends," said Polcher.

Glimpsing a stranger swinging down the brown trail that answered for the settlement's one street, he motioned with his head for the men to pass inside. To mollify the bully he added—

"You understand, Lon, it's yourself as much as it's us you'll be hurting by too much talk."

"It's that last drink of that —— peach brandy," mumbled Hester. "I'll stick to rye after this. I can carry that."

"Now you're talking like a man of sense," warmly approved Polcher, clapping him heartily on the shoulder. "Lord, what fools we all be at times when we git too much licker in. The boss combed me once till I thought he was going to kill me just because I got to speaking too free. Now let's join the boys and try that rye."

OUTWARDLY amiable again, Hester followed him indoors; deep in his heart murder was sprouting. He knew Polcher wished to pacify him, and this knowledge only fanned his fury higher. And he knew Polcher had lied in confessing to babbling, for the tavern-keeper's taciturnity, even when he drank, was that of his Indian ancestors.

The whisky was passed, Polcher jovially proclaiming it was his treat in honor of Hester's return from somewhere after a month's absence. Hester tossed off his portion without a word, now determined not to open his lips again except in monosyllables. Old Thatch sought to arouse him to a playful mood with a chuckling reminder of some deviltry he had played on a new settler over on the Holston. But even pride in his evil exploits could not induce Hester to emerge from his brooding meditations.

For the first time since he had won the right to wear the cock's feather he had been backed down—and, at that, in the presence of the rough men he had domineered by his brutality. Of course it was the knife that had done it, he told himself, and yet he knew it was something besides the knife. If Old Thatch had held a knife at his throat, he would have laughed at him. No, it wasn't that; it was the discovery that there dwelt in Polcher's obsequious form a man he had never suspected. The knowledge enraged while subduing him. He recalled former insolences to the tavern-keeper, his treatment of him as if he were a humble servitor.

It was humiliating to know that, while he was sincere in his behavior, Polcher had played a part, had tricked him. He knew that Polcher would gladly have him resume the rôle of bully, swear at him and treat him with disdain. He had no doubt but that Polcher would meekly submit to such browbeating. But never again could he play the bully with Polcher, and all this just because he understood how Polcher had fooled him by submitting in the past. This was gall to his little soul. The man he had looked down upon with contempt had been his master all along.

His smoldering rage was all the more acute because he had believed he had been the selected agent in mighty affairs; whereas, he had acted simply as a messenger. On entering the settlement early that morning he had smiled derisively at beholding the tavern and the usual group before the door. He had supposed himself miles above them in the secrets of the great game about to be played. Now his self-sufficiency was pricked and had deflated like a punctured bladder.

Being of cheap fiber, Hester had but one mental resource to fall back upon: the burning lust to reestablish himself in his own self-respect by killing Polcher. He had been grossly deceived. He had been permitted to believe—nay, even encouraged

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to believe—the breed was only the vintner to the elect. It was while wallowing in the depths of this black mood that the sunlight was blocked from the doorway by the arrival of the stranger Polcher had glimpsed up the trail.

The newcomer paused and waited for the sunshine to leave his eyes before entering the long and dimly lighted room. His hunting-shirt was fringed and tasseled and encircled by a bead-embroidered belt. From this hung a war-ax, severe in design and bespeaking English make. His long dark hair was topped with a cap of mink-skin. In his hand he carried the small-bore rifle of the Kentuckians. The loungers drew aside to both ends of the bar, leaving an open space for him. He took in the room and its occupants with one wide, sweeping glance; hesitated, then advanced.

It maddened Hester to observe how servilely Polcher leaned forward to take the stranger's order. The other men, seemingly intent on their drink, quickly summed up the newcomer. A forest-ranger fresh from Kentucky. He stood nearly six feet in his moccasins and carried his head high as his gray eyes ranged deliberately over the two groups before returning to meet the bland gaze of Polcher.

In a drawling voice he informed —

"A little whisky."

"You've traveled far, sir," genially observed Polcher, his Indian blood prompting him to deduce a long, hard trail from the stained and worn garments. "That beadwork is Shawnee, I take it."

"It was once worn by a Shawnee," grimly replied the stranger. "Lost my horse a few miles back and had to hoof it afoot."

"Virginy-born," murmured Polcher.

"Yes, I'm from old Virginy," proudly retorted the stranger, tossing up his head. "A mighty fine State."

"Quite a number of ye Virginians seem keen to git clear of her mighty fine State an' come down here to squat on North Car'lina land," spoke up Hester, his insolent half-closed eyes advertising mischief.

The newcomer slowly turned and eyed him curiously and smiled faintly as he noted the cock's feather. And he quietly reminded:

"The first settlers on the Watauga were Virginians. When they came here fourteen years ago, they reckoned they was on soil owned by Virginy. I don't reckon North Car'lina lost anything by their mistake." He threw off his drink and proceeded to deliver himself of the sting he had held in reserve. "From what I hear, the Sand-hillers didn't care to come over the mountains and face the Indians till after the Virginians had made the country safe."

The two groups of men shifted nervously. Hester's eyes flew open in amazement, then half-closed in satisfaction.

"The —— they had to wait for Virginy to blaze a trail!" he growled, slowly straightening up his long form and tipping his hat and its belligerent feather down over one eye. "An' where was ye, mister, when the first brave Virginians kindly come over here to make things safe for North Car'lina?"

"I was eleven years old, shooting squirrels in Virginy," chuckled the stranger.

"An' wearin' a Shawnee belt! Who give it to ye?"

"The warrior who was through with it when I got through with him. It happened up on the Ohio," was the smiling response. "Anything else you'd like to ask?"

"Killed a Injun, eh?" jeered Hester. "That's easy to tell. Sure ye ain't the feller that licked the Iroquois all to thunder? No one here to prove ye didn't, ye know."

Toying with his empty glass, the stranger again surveyed Hester, much as if the bully were some strange kind of insect. He grimaced in disgust as he observed the long, pointed finger-nails. "One thing's certain," he drawled, "you never fought no Iroquois, or they'd have them talons and that hair of yours made into a necklace for some squaw to wear. Just what is your fighting record, anyway?"

"I ain't never been licked yet by anything on two kickers atween here an' the French Broad," bellowed Hester, slouching forward, his hands held half open before him. Then he flapped his arms and gave the sharp challenge of a game-cock. "I'm Lon Hester, what trims 'em down when they're too big an' pulls 'em out when they're too short." And again he sounded his chanticleer's note.

"I'm Kirk Jackson, from the Shawnee country, and I reckon it's high time your comb was out," was the even retort.

"Just a minute, gentlemen," purred Polcher, with a wink at Hester. "Fun's fun,

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but, when you're armed with deadly weapons, you might carry a joke too far. Before you start fooling, let's put all weapons one side."

Jackson's brows contracted, but, as Hester promptly threw a knife and pistol on the bar, the Virginian reluctantly stood his rifle against the wall and hung his belt on it. It was obvious he was regretting the situation. Hester read in it a sign of cowardice and crowed exultingly. For a moment Jackson stood with his gaze directed through the open door. Hester believed he contemplated bolting and edged forward to intercept him. What had attracted Jackson's gaze, however, was the slim figure of a girl on horseback, and, as he stared, she turned and glanced toward the tavern, and his gray eyes lighted up with delighted recognition.

"Take yer last peep on natur', 'cause I'm goin' to have both of 'em," warned Hester, hitching forward stiff-legged, his hands held wide for a blinding gouge.

"You dirty dog!" gritted Jackson, his soul boiling with fury at the brutality of the threat.

WITH a spring Hester leaped forward, his right hand hooking murderously close to the gray eyes. Jackson gave ground and found himself with his back dangerously close to the group at the end of the room. He could feel the men stiffening behind him, and he believed they would play foul if Hester needed assistance. As Hester made his second rush, Jackson worked with both elbows and knocked two men away from his back, sending one reeling against the wall, the other against the bar.

Then he leaped high, his legs working like scissors, feinting with his left foot and planting the right under the bully's chin, smashing the long teeth through the protruding tongue and hurling him an inert mass against the base of the bar.

"No kickin'!" yelled Old Thatch, pulling a knife.

"You played foul!" roared Polcher, his suave mask dropping and leaving his dark face openly hideous. "Shut that door, boys!"

The men at the upper end of the bar rushed to the door and not only closed it but appropriated Jackson's rifle and belt. There was a stir behind him, and Jackson leaped to the end of the bar just vacated by the men. Here he wheeled and snatched a five-gallon jug of brandy from the bar and swung it high above his head. Then planting a foot on Hester's chest he warned:

"The first move made means I'll brain this dog at my feet and then damage the rest of you as much as I can."

Polcher and his henchmen stood motionless, wrathfully regarding the man at bay.

"You broke the rules by kicking," said Polcher.

"Rules, you miserable liar and scoundrel!" hissed Jackson. Then in a loud voice, "Open that door and stand clear, or I'll mash this punkin at my feet and rush you."

"One minute!" softly said Polcher. And he whipped a long pistol from under the bar and leveled it at Jackson. "You set that jug on the bar and do it soft-like. You've played foul with my friend. He's going to have a fair shake at you."

"Just let me git at him!" sobbed Hester from the floor. "That's all I ask, boys."

"Before you can move that jug an inch, I'll shoot your head off," warned Polcher. "Put the jug down and step to the middle of the floor. No one will meddle while Mr. Hester has a fair chance."

"Fair chance? You low-down murderers! Shoot and be ——!"

"I'll count three—then I'll shoot. There's witnesses here to say you come in drunk and hellin' for a row and got it. One—two——"

"Drop that pistol, Polcher!" called a voice at the window.

The tavern-keeper glanced about and paled as he beheld the muzzle of a long rifle creep in over the sill and bear upon him.

"If you'd said three, it would have been your last word on earth."

Polcher lowered his weapon but protested:

"Look here, Sevier, this stranger has assaulted one of my patrons. I propose to see they fight it out man-fashion."

"A man-fashion fight is a bit beyond your imagination," was the grim reply. "Have that door opened and see the stranger's rifle is stood outside. Be quick!"

Polcher nodded to Old Thatch, who threw back the door and passed the rifle and the belt. Jackson tingled with a fresh shock as he glimpsed a slim brown hand receiving

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the weapons. Then Sevier commanded:

"Now, young man, come out. If you want to be murdered, there's a rare chance for you anywhere along the border without entering this hell-hole. Remember, Polcher, you're a dead man if a hand is raised against this guest of yours."

Jackson sprang through the door and closed it after him. The girl he had seen passing the tavern at the inception of the brawl was waiting for him.

"Elsie!" he whispered, relieving her of his weapons. "I've just come from Charlotte, where I went to find you."

She was as fair as he was dark, and her blue eyes glistened as he addressed her. Then she sighed, and an expression of sadness overclouded her small face.

"I saw you for a second," she faltered. "It seemed impossible it could be you. I knew you would have trouble when I saw them close the door. I left my horse and called Mr. Sevier. Kirk, I'm glad to see you—and I'm sorry you came."

John Sevier, or Chucky Jack, as he was commonly called after the Nolichucky River he lived on, stepped round the corner of the tavern before Jackson could reply to the girl's contradictory statement and bruskly called out:

"Come along, Miss Tonpit. And you, sir; this is no place for an honest man to linger in."

"I owe you thanks. I'll try to thank you later," said Jackson. "I find Miss Tonpit is an old acquaintance—an old friend—I'll walk home with her."

The girl cast a swift glance at Sevier and faintly shook her head. Sevier tucked his arm through Jackson's and quietly insisted:

"You must come with me now; Miss Tonpit is perfectly safe—perfectly safe."

To Jackson's amazement the girl flushed, then turned pale and ran to where her horse was tied to a tree.

"—— it, man! Virginians don't leave such matters to chance," cried Jackson, tugging to release his arm. "The young lady should be escorted home. This seems to be a desperate community."

"I, too, am a Virginian," Sevier calmly reminded, tightening his hold on the other's arm. "And I know the community better than you do." There was a peculiar hardness in his voice as he added, "Miss Tonpit is perfectly safe in any part of the Watauga settlements at any time of day or night, providing her identity is known."

Jackson stared savagely into Sevier's face and hoarsely demanded—

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Nothing to her hurt, God bless her!" was the ready response. "But this is no place to talk. If there was an ounce of courage to go with the ton of hate back in the tavern, we'd both be riddled with bullets before this. Step over to the court-house where we can talk."

"But, Miss Tonpit? She lives near here? I shall have a chance to see her again?"

And Jackson held back and gazed after the girl, who was now cantering up the trail towards the foot-hills.

"Every opportunity, I should say," assured Sevier, leading the way into the court-house. "Now suppose you give an account of yourself. I'm sort of a justice of the peace here. We're hungry for honest men, God knows. I believe you'll fit in with the court-house crowd rather than with the tavern crowd."

"But Elsie? Miss Tonpit?"

"Your story first," Sevier insisted, seating himself at the table and motioning Jackson to a stool fashioned from a solid block of cedar.

Jackson surrendered and rapidly narrated:

"I'm Kirk Jackson, Virginian. I met the Tonpits in Charlotte a little over a year ago and fell in love with Miss Elsie. I must confess my suit didn't progress as I had hoped. I think her father was opposed. I can't blame him. Major Tonpit's daughter can look higher than a forest-ranger. Anyway, I went back to the Ohio country, where I had served under George Rogers Clark. I'm just back from there. Absence had renewed my courage.

"I hurried back to Charlotte and learned the major had moved over the mountains. My informant didn't know whether he had made his new home in the Watauga district or on the Holston. I saw and recognized her just as that brute in the tavern was preparing to tear my eyes out. Now tell me what you meant by saying she is safe anywhere hereabouts, providing her identity is known."

Sevier drummed the table and frowned. Then he explained:

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"John Tonpit, according to all indications, holds the whip-hand over these scoundrels here. They serve him, I believe."

"Good heavens!" Jackson weakly exclaimed. "Major Tonpit, proud to arrogance—having truck with those scoundrels?"

And he wondered if this were the girl's reason for pronouncing his quest of her as hopeless. Then he rallied with the buoyancy of youth. If the only barrier between them was some sinister business of her father's, he would overcome it, although great be her pride.

"Can't you tell me something more definite?"

SEVIER tapped a document on the table and replied:

"This is a petition I'm about to send to Governor Martin. North Carolina is dumping criminals and trash upon us, and we're asking for a superior court to handle their cases. The Creeks, under Alexander McGillivray, are working day and night to get the Cherokees to join them in a decisive war against all settlers on the Watauga, the Holston and the French Broad. The petition asks for power to raise militia and for officers to lead the men."

"But how does Major Tonpit come into this?" broke in Jackson. "Tavern brawlers and hostile red men!"

"I'm coming to that, if there is any that. The Creeks have made a secret treaty with Spain. McGillivray pledges twenty thousand warriors towards exterminating the Western settlements."

"But you can't know that for a fact."

"You've been away the last year. You're out of touch with affairs. The treaty was signed at Pensacola, June first, by McGillivray on behalf of the Creek Nation and by Don Estephan Miro, Governor of West Florida and Louisiana, on behalf of Spain."

Jackson was nonplussed by this intelligence. He gazed in silence at the man across the table, whose words were building a mighty barrier between him and the girl. Sevier's handsome face softened in sympathy. He was a tall, fair-skinned man with an erect carriage, and his slender figure well set off the hunting-shirt he invariably wore. Eager and impulsive by nature, he was now holding himself in restraint because he knew his revelations were so many blows at the young ranger's happiness.

"The major fits into all this. Spain and the Creeks?" Jackson faintly asked.

"So I firmly believe. There is one flaw in the chain—the Cherokees. For, while McGillivray has pledged twenty thousand braves, his Creeks can't furnish any such a number of fighting men. There are a few thousand Seminoles he can get, but unless he lines up the Cherokee Nation he has promised more warriors than he can call to the war-path. One of the principal chiefs of the Cherokees, Old Tassel, is holding off. He controls three thousand warriors. He wants his lands back, but he wants to get them by peaceful measures.

"Major Tonpit has great influence with Old Tassel. Could he swing him for a war against us, not only would his three thousand fighting men be added to McGillivray's total, but the rest of the Cherokee Nation, now hesitating, would gladly rush in. Major Tonpit may supply the link to complete the chain. It will be the weakest link in the chain, yet absolutely necessary for McGillivray's success."

"Tonpit a schemer for Spain!" gasped Jackson.

Sevier frowned, then shrugged his shoulders and corrected:

"Scarcely a schemer. He isn't cold-blooded enough for that. For a schemer you need a man of Polcher's cool mind. Tonpit is flattered by attentions from royalty. He loves royalty. His head is in the clouds of personal ambition. He sees himself a dictator of a mighty province reaching from the Alleghanies to the Mississippi. If put in as royal governor he would rule supreme, he believes.

"I became suspicious when he gave up his comfortable home in Charlotte and went to the State capital and then came out here and made his home. Since being here, he has informed Governor Martin that the Indians are friendly and desire peace but that our settlers persist in stealing their lands and abusing them. This has won him the friendship of Old Tassel. Every talk Tassel has sent to the governor has been carried by Tonpit."

"That's bad!" cried Jackson. "But I can't make myself believe he deliberately plots for Spain. Even in the national Congress men are expressing different views as

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to what shall be done with the region west of the mountains."

"True. And Major Tonpit takes the views of Charles III."

"But he may be friendly with Old Tassel and yet not be working with the Creeks," persisted Jackson, trying to find something favorable to say in behalf of Elsie's father.

"I know he is hand in glove with McGillivray," solemnly declared Sevier. "I know McGillivray looks on him as a man of insane ambitions but lacking balance. I know McGillivray even now is holding back from war only because he is not quite satisfied that Tonpit will live up to his agreements. It isn't the major's heart or courage he doubts, but his lack of balance. Once he gets what he believes to be a firm hold on Tonpit, you'll see things begin to hum along the Holston and the Watauga."

Jackson shifted the trend of conversation, seeking to find a weak spot in Sevier's hypothesis.

"After all, McGillivray's probably overrated. I never saw an Indian yet who could plan a campaign and stick to it," he hopefully said.

Sevier smiled ruefully.

"You don't know Alexander McGillivray, who calls himself 'Emperor' of the Creek Nation. His father was Lachlan McGillivray, a Scotch trader. His half-breed mother was of a powerful family of the Hutalgalgi, or Wind clan. Her father was a French officer. McGillivray was educated at Charleston and studied Latin and Greek as well as the usual branches. He's a partner in the firm of Panton, Forbes and Leslie in Pensacola. Naturally that firm has a monopoly of the Creek trade. He's shrewd as a Scotchman, has the polish of a Frenchman and is more cunning than any of his Indians. He is an educated gentleman according to English standards. He lives up to his title of 'Emperor'. I must say this for him: he's kind to captives and honestly tries to do away with the usual Indian cruelties.

"Now to return to my petition to show where we fit in. It's Old Tassel's deadly fear of the Watauga riflemen as much as his desire for peace that is holding him back. And, if he should die, his three thousand warriors would flock to McGillivray at once. The renegade Cherokees, who call themselves Chickamaugas, are impatient to take the path. As things are turning out, my riflemen aren't enough. They've served without pay. The new settlers demand pay. We must have power to raise and equip militia."

"I begin to understand," Jackson sadly admitted. "This Polcher? He must be active in anything evil."

"He's cunning. His tavern is where messages are brought and relayed on. If word comes to Tonpit, it is left at the tavern and sent secretly. Look here, young man! Perhaps I've talked more freely than I should. You're in love with Miss Elsie, and you'd be a fool if you weren't. But that naturally makes you wish to see things that exonerate the major. Wander round and see and hear for yourself. In a few days, maybe, I'll feel like telling you something else. Only remember this: Elsie Tonpit hasn't a better friend west of the Alleghanies than John Sevier. By heavens! I'm a better friend to her than her father is!"

He clamped his lips together and began rereading the petition.

Jackson studied the strong visage with new interest. Sevier's face reminded him strongly of Washington's in its Anglo-Saxon lines of determination. But there was also a certain mobility of expression, a mirroring of emotions, which came from his French blood. He was a Virginian, and the young ranger had heard his fame echoing up and down the lonely Ohio. As Nolichucky Jack—usually clipped to Chucky Jack—his name was reputed to be worth a thousand rifles when he took the field against the red men.

But it puzzled Jackson to understand how this man, a gentleman born and bred, could have left the solid comforts of his home at Newmarket in the beautiful valley of the Shenandoah, thrust behind him positive assurances of great political advancement, cast off the social prominence he so naturally graced and bring his Bonnie Kate to the lonely country of the Nolichucky.

JACKSON'S material mind had taught him that one fought Indians because one must, not from choice. A beautiful and devoted wife and ample fortune appealed to the young ranger as being the goal in life. It never entered his process of reasoning that Destiny transplants

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men to obtain results, just as Nature supplies seeds with methods of locomotion so that new regions may be fructified. The vital incentive for Jackson's admiration for the man was not his sacrifices but rather his knowledge that Chucky Jack had invented a new style of forest-fighting.

He could not know that in his lifetime a certain Corsican would utilize the same tactics in overrunning Europe: namely, the hurling of a small force with irresistible momentum and the achieving of greater results thereby than by the leisurely employment of large bodies of soldiery. The border already rang with the victories of Chucky Jack, who was to fight thirty-odd battles with the red men and never suffer a defeat; whose coming to the Watauga country marked the passing of defensive warfare and instituted the offensive.

"Yes, it's natural that you should try to think leniently of Major Tonpit," murmured Sevier without raising his eyes from the petition.

Jackson flushed and coldly replied:

"I am a Virginian, first and last. I have nothing to do with the Spanish King."

"We soon must begin to call ourselves Americans—if we wouldn't bend the knee to Spain," gently corrected Sevier with a whimsical smile.

"Of course," agreed Jackson. "We're all Americans now. But first we are Virginians, I take it."

Sevier rose and stood at the window and stared thoughtfully across the valley and spoke as one repeating articles of faith in the privacy of his chamber:

"Virginians when we were colonials, but now Americans first and last—if this republic is to endure. If this union of States is to last, we must forget our former identity; we must be merged in one compact body and be known as Americans. Well, well. It will all come some day, please God!"

He broke off and leaned from the window and called out:

"Ho, Major Hubbard! Step here a minute."

Jackson saw a tall figure in forest dress turn in the trail leading to the woods. As the man came toward the court-house, he beheld a dark, gloomy face, a countenance he could never imagine as being lighted with a smile. Hubbard came up to the window, and Sevier said:

"Mr. Jackson, step here, please. Meet Major James Hubbard. Major, this is Kirk Jackson, fresh from the Shawnee country and come to live with us."

Hubbard's face glowed with passion, and he clutched Jackson's hand fiercely and cried:

"The Shawnees! I envy you your chance, sir."

Sevier gently nudged Jackson to stand aside and, leaning from the window, muttered:

"Major, times are ticklish. Any little break will mean ruin to many cabins. Remember!"

Hubbard made some reply inaudible to Jackson. In a freer tone Sevier asked—

"What is the latest news?"

"That —— mixed-blood, John Watts, and his Chickamaugas have gone to water. They'll be raiding the French Broad and Holston next."

Sevier pursed his lips musingly and said:

"We must have more men, more arms and money. North Carolina must act on my petition."

Hubbard laughed harshly and sneered:

"Why should they give money when you've always been ready to foot the bills? Ask them for money, and they'll tell you that the Indians—curse them, curse them—are friendly and much abused. And they'll leave you to pay the shot."

"I can't pay again. I've spent my all," Sevier quietly answered. "But I'm hopeful the State will show common sense. North Carolina must realize we're no longer able to handle the criminals pouring over the mountains without courts; that we're unable to stand off the Creek Nation once the Cherokees join it. Old Tassel can't always hold his three thousand in check."

"His chiefs rebel. Many of his young warriors are stealing away to go to water and follow Watts," was the gloomy response.

A few words more and Hubbard returned to the trail and struck off for the forest. Sevier stood and looked after him uneasily. Wheeling about, his face betrayed his anxiety and prompted Jackson to ask:

"What's the matter with him? Any relation to Hubbard, the Injun-killer, we heard about up on the Ohio?"

"He is the killer. He's killed more Cherokees than any other three men on the border. His family was wiped out by Shawnees back in Virginia. You can't

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make him believe any Indian should be allowed to live. And he worries me. Now he's off to scout the forest. It only needs the killing of an Indian or so to explode the powder under our feet. Huh! I wish he had not gone."

"He had news?"

"Nothing more than we've suspected for a year. John Watts is always ready to take the path. He's the shrewdest of the Cherokee leaders. If Old Tassel loses his grip or should decide that peace doesn't pay——"

His French blood found expression in an outward gesture of the hands as he dropped down at the table.

Toying with the petition and speaking his thoughts aloud, he ran on:

"But Major Hubbard wants war. He's inclined to look on the dark side of things. Tush! The State by this time realizes what we've won for her without an ounce of help. Pure selfishness will compel the Legislature to send us the necessary aid. Ha! There's news, by heavens! The Cherokees must have struck!"

It was the distant clatter of flying hoofs. Sevier dropped through the window with Jackson at his heels. Polcher and his henchmen were piling from the tavern and staring toward the mountains. Some one was riding at top speed from the east.

Although the rider might be bringing the fate of a continent, Jackson's first interest was in a man and woman cantering up the trail from the opposite direction. Instead of watching for the furious rider, he had eyes only for the two. The man was tall and gaunt and of haughty bearing, his sharp, cold face swinging from side to side as if he were the master riding among slaves. The girl was his daughter, Elsie Tonpit. The young Virginian forgot the approaching messenger and ran toward the couple, his heart beating tumultuously.

To his glad surprize Tonpit greeted him with a shadowy smile and stretched out a hand in welcome. The girl, however, betrayed symptoms of alarm instead of being pleased by her father's attempt at cordiality. She even sought to evade the fond gaze of her lover and glanced apprehensively toward the court-house. Jackson knew in a moment that she felt shame for what she believed Sevier had told him.

"When Elsie informed me you were in Jonesboro, Mr. Jackson, I set out to find you," Tonpit now delighted the young man by saying.

"I have to thank her and Sevier for rescuing me from a ridiculous position," he blurted out and then bit his tongue for having uttered the words.

"Ha! How is that?" coldly demanded Tonpit, but with his gaze seeking a glimpse of the rider, now well among the cabins.

"The men in the tavern were taking advantage of their numbers," quickly spoke up the girl. "The man called Hester was the ringleader, I should say."

"This is the first time you've said anything about it," murmured her father, his eyes now lighting as they focussed on the bobbing figure of the horseman.

"It only needed Mr. Sevier's command to relieve Mr. Jackson of any embarrassment," she awkwardly explained.

Tonpit's thin visage grew cold with hate.

"I and my friends refuse to be beholden to this man Sevier," he harshly warned.

And, touching spur to his mount, he beckoned the girl to follow him and darted toward the tavern. With one backward glance she rode after him.

Jackson ran forward, as did Sevier, as the rider reined in before the tavern door and wearily dismounted. From all quarters came the settlers and their families. Polcher brought out a pitcher of brandy, and the messenger drank deeply. Then jumping on a horse-block he waved a paper in his hand and cried out—

"For Chucky Jack!"

"Here!" called Sevier from the edge of the crowd.

The missive was tossed into his outstretched hand. As he was breaking the seal, the messenger drew a deep breath, waved his arms for silence and shouted——

"North Carolina has ceded us to the central Government to pay for her part of the war debt!"

CHAPTER II

THE DEAD ARE DANGEROUS

WITH a low word for his daughter to follow him Tonpit backed his horse clear from the crowd and spurred away. For sixty seconds the astounded gathering remained motionless. Sevier stared incredulously at the message, while his neighbors gazed stupidly at the dusty messenger. All

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felt as if they had been abandoned in the wilderness without shelter or means of self-defense. True, the over-mountain men had always fought their own way and financed their own campaigns, yet in the back of their minds was ever the thought that, should a crisis come, the mother State must aid them.

That a crisis was imminent was evidenced by Chucky Jack's open mention of his petition for soldiers. Chucky Jack was worth many riflemen and had whipped the Indians many times. All the more proof that the settlements must be in desperate straits when he was impelled to beseech help. And of a sudden they were disowned; there was no mother State, no slumbering asset they could call to life.

Sevier had not talked much about the possibility of Creeks and Cherokees uniting, but the petition, coupled with whispered rumors seeping through the cabins, now brought morbid speculations. How many Indians would come and when, were the questions more than one man and woman asked themselves. Who would go to hold the line on the French Broad so that the red raiders might not penetrate to the Watauga?

Jackson watched Tonpit ride hastily away, followed by Elsie, and he fancied he beheld elation in the man's hard visage and sorrow in the girl's gentle face. It was quite a coincidence, too, that Major Tonpit should ride forth just in time to learn the momentous news—unless he had been expecting it and came purposely to hear it. His prompt return home gave color to the suspicion.

The young Virginian shifted his attention to Chucky Jack. Sevier perused the message for the second time, crumpled it into a ball as if to hurl it from him, thought better of it and tucked it inside his buckskin shirt and called to the assemblage:

"Women and men of the Watauga, North Carolina will have none of us. We're shoved through the door and told to shift for ourselves. To be exact, we're told to look to the central Government for protection. And, as you know, the ink is scarcely dry on the petition I was about to send to the Legislature, asking for courts and militia.

"Without consulting one of the twenty-five thousand settlers on this side of the mountains, North Carolina chooses to pay her share of the national debt by the simple process of ceding us to Congress. She proposes to pay her debts with lands we won by rifle and ax. The act was passed by the Legislature a month ago, and for thirty days, while the messenger was bringing the news, we have been set off from North Carolina.

"During those thirty days our plight has been as serious as it is now, only, not knowing the truth, we worried but little. This fact should teach us that we can care for ourselves during the next thirty days, and so on, until there is no danger from the Indians along our border. So I ask you to be of brave heart and to remember the Watauga people always have had to hoe their own row. Please God we can keep on.

"A year or two ago this message would have worried me none. I could send out the call, and my old friends would respond overnight, as fast as horseflesh could fetch them. If an Indian war comes now, it will be more serious than what we've experienced in the past but nothing that our rifles can not blast away. I still can count on my friends and old companions-in-arms. Of the newcomers who have come to us in such numbers I am not so sure."

And he paused to dart a lightning glance at Polcher and his cronies pressed about the tavern door.

"The national Congress oughter help us," piped up an old man.

"It would be glad to. But the nationa Government, while empowered to levy armies, can not compel a single State to furnish a soldier," Sevier reminded. "The national Government can do only what the States will permit it to do. Last year several hundred soldiers stormed the very doors of Congress and demanded their over-due pay, and Congress was unable to escape the mob's demands. There will come a time when our Congress will have the power to protect its citizens in this, or in any other, land. But not now."

"If not now, then by the Eternal, men of Watauga, there is one power that can defend us!" cried Polcher from the tavern doorway. "And we have only to ask to be freed from either Creek or Cherokee."

"Aye! Aye! Spain looks after its own!" cried another of the tavern coterie.

"So does the devil!" thundered Sevier, enraged at Polcher's making the Creek menace common property. "We'll get

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nothing from Spain only as we pay dearly for it. And remember, there can be no danger from the Creeks except as Spain sets the mischief afoot. All who would be free and live in security follow me to the court-house. Messengers must be sent out; delegates must be elected and called here."

"What's yer plan?" hooted a tavern fellow.

"My plan is to form a Government of our own and to be admitted into the Union as a separate State!" retorted Sevier in a ringing voice.

The decent element raised a hoarse cheer, and faces heretofore gloomy became inspired. Polcher quickly warned:

"Vermont's been trying to be admitted ever since 1776. We can't stand on air, neither one thing nor another. Spain will protect us and give us justice. If she should fail, we could turn to and drive her into the gulf!"

"The time to drive her into the gulf is before you slip on her yoke!" shouted Sevier. "And, if we're able to do that same thing, why seek her protection? To the court-house!"

The women gathered in knots to discuss the startling news. The men followed their old leader. Jackson remained outside the court-house, watching the scene. His experience with Kentuckians on the Ohio had taught him the feeble central Government was powerless to function in a crisis like this—and this because the thirteen States retained the mental attitude of the thirteen colonies.

Polcher's advocacy of accepting the protection of Spain was not painfully repugnant to Jackson, no more than it was to some others west of the mountains, who believed themselves forsaken and left to shape their own destiny. When it hurt, it hurt pride, not a national spirit. He repudiated the idea because of an instinctive dislike to domination by any foreign power. His sense of Americanism was not shocked as Sevier's was, for the union Polcher openly urged, and which John Tonpit was suspected of secretly promoting, simply meant a political affiliation and not the death of national ideals, the seeds of which were scarcely sown.

Jackson, however, firmly opposed the project, for his forebears had come to America to escape overlords. Then again common sense told him the law of compensation would decree that Spain's protégés must pay Spain's price.

Being in this frame of mind, he saw no reason why he sould not play his luck by accepting Tonpit's courteous demeanor at full face-value and profit by it to the extent of wooing his daughter. His last meeting with Tonpit before going to the Ohio country convinced him his suit was frowned upon. Now, with the father's smile still soothing him, with a vivid picture of Elsie's shy, backward glance, he had small liking for the court-house and its jumble of loud-voiced phillipics against Spain and North Carolina. The situation was localized in his estimation. And yet he hesitated, his loyalty to Sevier, whom he had known for only a few hours, holding him back.

Polcher came from the tavern with Lon Hester, and Jackson thrust his thumbs into his belt and strode toward them, thinking it timely to conclude the morning's one-sided argument. But Polcher said some hurried words to the bully, who turned and hastened down the trail, while the tavern-keeper himself affected to ignore the truculent ranger and strolled toward the court-house. Jackson turned to follow him, only to behold the people pouring from the building. There came staccato commands, and a score of men flew to their horses and rode away.

The Virginian breathed in relief. It was not necessary for him to choose between love and duty. Chucky Jack had rushed matters through with his characteristic energy, and the messengers were off to arrange for the election of delegates. The tavern-keeper, too, was no longer visible, and with nothing to detain him Jackson took the trail to the south, his heart as light as his moccasined feet.

What recked youth in love-time even if the fate of the Anglo-Saxon race in America were at stake! Ever thus does youth help shape the course of political evolution, help win a world without realizing the achievement, and only ask in the midst of astounding events that the heart of a simple maid be won.

The dalliance of the young man's thoughts blinded him, and his feet followed the rough path unguided by his eyes. Some premonition that she was near was what finally awakened him from his smiling reverie. He halted and threw back his head with a jerk. Tonpit's commodious

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cabin stood in from the trail, surrounded by clumps of cedar and basswood. Within ten feet of the ranger stood Elsie.

JACKSON reddened with confusion. He knew he had been smiling as he came down the trail, and the restrained merriment tugging the corners of her mouth proclaimed her a witness to his deportment. He felt as sheepish as if she had detected him making faces at himself in a mirror.

"Elsie, I've come all the way from the Ohio to win the privilege of calling you sweetheart," he hurriedly greeted.

She cast an apprehensive glance toward the house.

"I like you, Kirk. You know how much," she wistfully began. "My father——"

"He seemed glad to see me," he completed as she hesitated.

And he gained her side and took her hands in his.

"He is glad to see few men," she warned. "He loves me, but to others he's cold."

"Politics," assured Jackson. "Big men always have political bees swarming through their heads. I wouldn't give a beaver's pelt for all the political power they can develop in this whole country. I'm a free man, and you're a free maid, and your politician is a slave. And you must love me, dear."

"And I'm a free maid, and I must," she quoted, drawing him out of range of the cabin.

"Elsie, not another step till I know," he whispered. "I asked myself every step from the falls of the Ohio, but now, you must—please!"

"Then I must if I must," she murmured, dancing ahead toward a natural arbor.

"Wait!" he cried. "I bring a belt from the Ohio to the dearest little girl in the world. It shows a white road leading to a little cabin, which shall be the happiest home in all the col—I mean the States."

She seated herself on a log and he kneeled by her side. She remained silent, her eyes averted to hide her glorious confusion.

"I've brought my talk," he whispered. "What does the wonderful little woman say to it? Does she pick up the belt, the white wampum, the one road leading to the cabin?"

"I like your talk," she confessed. "Oh, I like it more than you can ever know, Kirk. But my father—he won't let me pick your belt up."

"I'm not asking your father to marry me," he reminded.

"Don't speak in that voice," she whimpered, wilting against him. "Kirk, dear! I'm miserable. Ever since coming over the mountains I've sensed poison in the air."

He patted her hair and waited for her to continue.

"It's something I can't understand. It's something that keeps my father up all night, walking his room. And yet, when I go to him, it's to always find him strangely exalted."

"Politics," he belittled. "What has that to do with our love?"

She lifted her head and revealed eyes round with fear and warned:

"But it does! It concerns our happiness deeply. Not that he has said anything. Not that his love for me ever changes——"

"Good Lord! Love for you—change?" he gasped.

"I say it hasn't, you silly. But after the messenger came and we were riding home, he asked me if I would make a sacrifice for him. He didn't say what but gave me to understand it would be only for a short time. Now I'll make any sacrifice for my father, only——"

She persisted in her silence, and he gravely prompted—

"Go on, sweetheart."

"Only I must know it will help him."

"Tell me what he asked you to do and let be the judge."

"He's asked nothing as yet. I think he plans to tell me tonight. He said something about my understanding everything tonight. Since then he's been in his room, whistling and singing. Never in my life have I heard him whistle or sing before. And, do you know, he has a beautiful voice—and I never knew it before."

"When a man can sing and whistle, he can't be planning to ask much of a sacrifice of his daughter."

"Oh, I'm not fearing what he may ask. He's been a good father to me. I must be perfectly loyal to him in my heart. I only wish he didn't have men come to see him—that is, certain kind of men."

She gave him an odd look, then, forgetting the house was hidden by the trees, she gazed over his shoulder. He was quick to detect the glint of alarm in her eyes and asked—

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"Who's with him now?"

"Nay, you must not ask me. That would mean I was spying on him. Doubtless I'm very silly. I shall know all tonight. Tomorrow, if we should meet alone, I'll perhaps be able to tell you."

"We certainly shall meet alone," he promised. "But why wait till tomorrow? Why not this afternoon or tonight? I sha'n't sleep a wink if I have to wait till tomorrow. Why not here?"

"Oh, I couldn't, Kirk," she protested. In the next breath she filled him with ecstasy by declaring, "And yet I will if possible. Tonight—come when the moon is clearing the forest, two hours before midnight. He always goes to his room at that hour. I shall be here on the hour and will wait for you, but you mustn't wait for me. I shall come promptly or not at all."

"But if I come and you're not here—" he began complaining.

"Hush, silly. I'll leave a note on this very log. Don't wait if I'm not here. Don't wait if the note is not here. It will simply mean I couldn't leave the house without disturbing him."

"Why couldn't I call at the house?"

"Oh, no! Not at the house," she hurriedly cried. "Promise?"

"Very well. I'll come as far as this arbor."

"Now, don't be ugly. Some time you can come to a house and know you'll always find me ——"

"You darling!" he softly exulted.

She lifted her head from his shoulder and touched a finger to his lips. A voice was calling her name.

"It's father," she warned, unwarrantably alarmed her lover thought.

He made to walk a bit with her, but she gently pushed him back into the arbor. Then, giving him her lips, she ran to the house.

He should have walked the skies as he returned to the settlement, but somehow complete happiness was held in abeyance until he could learn what it was that Tonpit was to ask of his daughter. His peace of mind could not return until he had seen her again and learned the truth. He had worried none while with her, for joy had destroyed perspective and dulled imagination. He had actually lived in the present, taking toll of each delicious minute. Now he was recalling her father's reputation as a man of mystery.

Back east, before his last trip to the Shawnee country, he had heard strange remarks concerning John Tonpit. Here in Jonesboro the talk was resumed. He could remember when Tonpit was counted a poor man, but now he seemed to be above want. The sordid fact angered him by persisting in invading his specualtions. John Sevier had the right of it in saying Tonpit was engaged in a conspiracy—no doubt about that. But it was left for the girl herself to hint that she might be involved in his wretched schemes.

"—— his beastly ambitions!" growled Jackson, turning from the trail and throwing himself under a clump of willows.

He lighted his pipe and smoked it empty before recovering any of his natural optimism. After all, he told himself, a father could not be unnatural with his only child. Tonpit's mode of address, even when talking to Elsie, was harsh. That characteristic induced one to attach undue significance to his simplest statements. The girl had permitted his solemn assertions to carry too much weight. She had confused the austere vehicle of his spoken thoughts with the simple meaning of his words.

"He's a queer one," Jackson admitted as he stowed his pipe preparatory to resuming his walk back to the settlement. "I can imagine the poor child being thrown into a panic by his cold voice announcing it's going to rain tomorrow."

He chuckled a bit at this caricature of the maid's awe, then fell back under the willows as the long shadow of a man fell across the sunlight within a few feet of him. Walking noiselessly, the stealthy figure of Lon Hester swung by.

For a moment Jackson was tempted to accost him and conclude the little argument started in the tavern. But his impulse vanished because of wonderment at the bully's presence at this end of the settlement. The tavern was his proper habitat. Again he saw Polcher whispering in the bully's ear and saw the latter set out afoot with the purposeful step of one going on an important errand. Linked up to this recollection was the girl's statement that her father had a visitor whom she was unwilling to name.

"But it couldn't have been the tavern

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brawler," muttered Jackson, rising and softly following Hester. "Still, Polcher was giving the lout some orders and sent him somewhere. And Sevier says Polcher is a deep one. Polcher showed he was for the Spanish alliance after the messenger came. He and Tonpit have the same fancy, it seems. But Tonpit was there and heard as much as Polcher did. What could happen that needed a message and a messenger? Sevier says all messages are brought to the tavern.

"Almost appears as if the affair was ripe for a sudden blow somewhere, for something decisive to happen—and Tonpit was singing and whistling. Good Lord! What with being thrown off by North Carolina and not yet accepted by the Union, it certainly isn't any time for the settlers to take on fresh troubles. Reckon I've been selfish. I'll see Chucky Jack and tell him what little I know."

Making a detour so as to escape the notice of the tavern loungers, Jackson approached the court-house from the east side of the settlement. The town was ominously calm. Small groups of men were quietly talking, and all carried their rifles. As they talked, they looked much at the court-house, where through the windows Sevier could be seen pacing back and forth, his hands clasped behind him, his head bowed. He was one man who carried the entire load of the settlement's troubles. He was idolized by the men, and there was none who would think of intruding in this his great hour of anxiety.

"Reckon, if Chucky Jack can't fix things up for us, there ain't no fixing to be done," one man spoke up and said to Jackson.

"He's a great man," heartily retorted Jackson. "I talked with him this morning for the first time. My name is Kirk Jackson, just returned from the Ohio."

"My name's Stetson. My cabin is on t'other side of the court-house. Seen you with him this morning. You'll eat with us today. Where's your horse?"

"Broke a leg a few miles out. Had to shoot him," the ranger sadly informed.

"Shoo! That's tough. I've got several. Help yourself any time. I'll tell the woman."

"It's a —— of a Government that leaves us folks to shift for ourselves," spoke up another settler, catching Jackson's eye.

"Seeing how you've always shifted for yourselves, I reckon you ain't worse off than you've always been," smiled Jackson. "And I reckon Jack Sevier's enough help for one settlement to have. The Indians are awfully scared of him."

"That's 'cause they know he won't wait to fight behind logs," Stetson broke in eagerly and with great pride. "They know that every time they make a raid he'll lead us straight into their country for a hundred miles or so and rip —— out of their villages. Nothing takes the fighting guts out of a Injun so much as to hear—while burning a few cabins—that Chucky Jack is back in their towns burning up all their corn. He's thinking up things now."

Jackson had halted his advance on the court-house because of the respectful aloofness of the settlers. But now came one who ignored the black frowns, an Indian. He was a Cherokee, and his path was to the court-house.

SUDDENLY a woman's shrill voice called from a cabin:

"The murderin' spy! He's come to see how we took the bad news!"

"There's more of his kidney back in the woods!" shouted a man.

The Indian continued his advance. The various groups of men thinned out and formed a half-circle behind him so as to block his retreat. The Indian halted and, still gazing at the court-house, threw back his head and sounded the wolf-howl, *wa-ya.* With muttered imprecations a score of rifles were brought to bear on him, while several men ran back to the forest to scout for a hidden foe. But the signal was intended only for Sevier, who now appeared at the window. A glance took in the situation, the erect form of the red man and the half-circle of menacing rifles. Leaning from the window, Sevier shouted:

"Put down those guns! I'll answer for the Cherokee!" Then to the savage, "The Tall Runner is welcome."

Without a glance behind him, the Indian made for the door. Sevier sighted Jackson and beckoned for him to enter.

Sevier was alone in the long room. He motioned for Jackson to remain in the background and, addressing the Indian, said:

"Tall Runner, of the Aniwaya people, is welcome. What talk does the warrior of the Wolf clan bring to me?"

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The man of the Wolf, the most powerful clan of the Cherokee Nation, permitted his gaze to kindle with admiration as he looked on Sevier. After a brief silence he began:

"I bring a talk from Old Tassel. He tells me to say to Tsan-usdi (Little John) that he is an old man. He says he is standing on slippery ground. He says his elder brother's people are building houses in sight of Cherokee towns and that his young warriors grow nervous. He says the white people living south of the French Broad have no right there, and he asks his elder brother to take them away."

Sevier waited for a minute, then replied:

"This is the talk I send back to Old Tassel. I will meet the Cherokee chiefs in a grand council and fix a place beyond which no settler shall go south of the French Broad and the Holston. Tell Old Tassel that, if he stands on slippery ground, it is because the Indians have wet the ground with the blood of white people, killed while traveling the Kentucky road and while hoeing their fields along the Watauga.

"As for the settlers who have made homes south of the French Broad, they can not now be removed, but, if the chiefs of the Nation will come to a council, we will agree they shall go no farther. The Cherokees know Tsan-usdi wants peace. But there can be no lasting peace so long as the Cherokee Nation listens to the evil whisperings of the Creeks and loads its guns with Spanish powder. Tell Old Tassel it was North Carolina that sent the settlers south of the French Broad, not Little John."

The Indian remained silent for several minutes, then with a cunning gleam in his eyes continued:

"I will carry your talk to Old Tassel. Who sends the talk? Tsan-usdi or North Carolina? Or does Tsan-usdi speak for North Carolina?"

Sevier's gaze hardened. He knew Old Tassel had learned of North Carolina's act of cession. This would imply advance knowledge on the part of the chief. The messenger was sent with a colorless talk, his real errand being to learn how the settlers were reacting to the Cessions Act.

In a voice of thunder he warned:

"Brother of the Wolf, I am going to speak to you. Be wise and remember my words. Tell Old Tassel the talk comes from Little John and his three thousand riflemen. Tell him to forget that the settlements are no longer a part of North Carolina. Tell him he is to remember that the settlers never have had help from North Carolina and have always depended upon their own guns. Tell him our rifles shoot as straight and that our horses run as swiftly as they did a few moons ago. I will send for Old Tassel when I have my council talk ready."

Tall Runner was somewhat abashed but did not offer to depart. He remained silent and motionless, staring furtively at the one white man the Cherokee Nation feared above all other men. For three centuries the Cherokees had made wars and treaties with the English, the Spanish, the French, the Americans, with Creeks, Catawbas, Shawnees and Iroquois, but in all their campaigns they had never shown so much respect, or fear, for any one individual as they had for John Sevier.

Sevier knew Tall Runner had something on his mind, something he had not intended to speak but was now tempted to divulge. Sternly, yet not unkindly, Sevier prompted:

"My brother of the Wolf has seen something on his way here, or has heard something. He thought at first to bury it deep in his head. Now his medicine commands him to tell it. The ears of Tsan-usdi are open; his heart is open. Does the Tall Runner speak?"

The Indian stood with eyes cast down as if irresolute; finally he lifted his head, succumbing to the personal magnetism of Sevier, a subtle influence that never failed to work on both friend and foe, and said:

"It is not in the talk I brought from our peace town of Echota. It is something I saw on the Great War-Path very near here. A dead man of the Ani-Kusa."

Sevier's hands gripped the edge of the table.

"A warrior from the upper Creek towns," he repeated.

"He was a messenger," was the laconic correction.

The borderer fully appreciated the grave results sure to follow the slaying of a messenger from McGillivray, Emperor of the Creek Nation. One faint hope remained, that the Creek had fallen by the hand of a Cherokee.

As if reading his thoughts, Tall Runner significantly added:

"The dead warrior was not scalped.

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He was shot by a white man hiding in ambush. I found where the white man kneeled and waited. I followed his trail back to the settlement. I found where his trail left the settlement and made for the woods."

There was no doubt in the minds of either Sevier or Jackson as to the identity of the assassin. Major Hubbard, his heart rankling with fanatical hatred for all red men, had left the village for the forest, taking the direction the Cherokee would cover on returning home.

"When was the Creek killed?" quietly asked Sevier.

"The blood had dried."

"Five hours ago," muttered Sevier. Then aloud, "How do you know the Creek brought a message for me?"

"Who else would he bring a talk to?" shrewdly countered Tall Runner. "He carried no arms. He was a messenger. His moccasins were worn through because of haste. He had not stopped at any of our villages to get new moccasins. His talk was for the white men. Little John is their chief."

"And by this time the news of his death is spreading," Sevier gloomily mused.

"I threw boughs on the body. It may not be seen if Tsan-usdi goes and covers it with earth. If others find it, the word will travel as far as a red ax or a war-belt can travel." Which was equivalent to saying that McGillivray would surely learn of the killing and seize upon it as pretext for declaring war upon the settlements.

Sevier walked to the window and back. When he halted before the Cherokee, his countenance was placid, and his voice was gentle as he directed:

"Go to Old Tassel and tell him my talk. That I will meet him and his head men and give them a talk; that I wish only for peace and will hold back the whites from going farther on Cherokee lands unless an Indian war makes me use all my riflemen in defending our cabins."

CHAPTER III

THE PRICE OF A JUG OF WHISKY

FINDING himself overlooked, Jackson reminded:

"I'm still here. If I'm in the way, I'll get out. Of course I couldn't help hearing your talk with the Cherokee."

"Don't go," Sevier replied. "I'm worried about the dead Creek. Tall Runner says he was an Ani-Kusa, from the upper towns. He brought a message from McGillivray. There was no writing on his body, or Tall Runner would have found it and brought it here. That makes two mysteries."

"I don't understand," Jackson confessed. "Two mysteries?"

"Who was to receive McGillivray's message? Who did receive the message?"

"Isn't it possible McGillivray is trying to treat with you; that some of the tavern crowd found it out and stole the message and killed the Indian?" Jackson put the query with much animation, the theory growing on him even as he spoke.

"No. McGillivray has spies at the State capital. He knew ahead what the Legislature intended doing before the Cessions Act was passed. He knows he couldn't swing me into line with Spain. Believing that the Watauga settlements are disowned and helpless, it's the tavern crowd he'd dicker with."

"If Hubbard killed him, why didn't he get the message?"

"I haven't any doubt as to Hubbard's killing him. He went in that direction in time to meet the Creek. He left us with blood in his thoughts, cursing all Indians and believing the Chickamaugas are taking the warpath. He saw the Creek and shot him. He never bothered to approach the body, much less to examine it. Either the Creek had delivered the message or it was found on his body by some white man before Tall Runner came along."

"I saw Hester leave the tavern and go down the trail in that direction right after the messenger brought the news of the Cessions Act," Jackson informed, his sense of duty overriding his disinclination to say anything that might compromise Tonpit.

"Ah! Hester never quits the tavern unless it's on important business. But none of that gang would kill a messenger sent them by McGillivray. It's through him that Spanish gold comes to them. Do you know where Hester went?"

Jackson was deeply embarrassed and felt himself slipping into deep water.

"I don't know, but I believe he visited John Tonpit. He was afoot and didn't plan to go far. A short time afterward I saw him coming up the trail. I didn't see

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him go to or come from Tonpit's house."

"My boy, why not tell it all?" gravely encouraged Sevier.

Jackson made his decision under the compelling gaze of the steady blue eyes and briefly related his meeting Miss Elsie and his knowledge that her father was closeted with a visitor.

"That would explain much!" rapped out Sevier. "McGillivray sent a written message to Major Tonpit. The bearer managed to get it to the tavern. Polcher forwarded it to Tonpit by Hester. If the Creek had taken it direct to the major, he probably would now be alive. But the system is to send all messages to the tavern, where they are relayed without exciting suspicion. That Polcher is a deep one. He's a natural conspirator. He loves underhanded methods. He must be an able man to hide his real self in the rôle of a tavern-keeper.

"Tonpit couldn't do that. He's insanely ambitious. He must always have a dignified part to play. Useful at a certain point when his dignity fits in, such as influencing some of our settlers to follow his lead, but incapable of continual plotting. He's just a fool figurehead. Yes, I'm convinced Polcher is the more dangerous man of the two."

Jackson hesitated and twisted nervously. His sympathies were entirely with the settlement. Although he had known Sevier for a few hours only, he was eager to serve him. Finally he blurted out:

"I expect to see Miss Elsie tonight. Naturally I don't care to set her father against me, but, if I learn anything that's all right for me to repeat, I'll tell you."

Leaning forward, Sevier swept his flaming gaze up and down the ranger's trim form in mingled anger and scorn.

"Young man," he softly said, "you're either an American or just a two-legged critter. Can't you see the time has come when it must be decided once for all whether an English or a Spanish-speaking race is to rule this country? What are your personal affairs compared with the destiny of a world? As an American you'll do nothing dishonorable. I don't expect you to wheedle secrets from Elsie, whom I've known and loved dearly and who is as good an American as I am. But there's no reason why you shouldn't go to John Tonpit and put the question to him frankly: did he or did he not confer with Lon Hester this morning?"

"That means I lose the girl," Jackson sadly reminded.

"Not if she is the girl I've always believed her to be. I tell you she's an American girl. She may not call it that, but she is. She would despise you if you dodged your duty to secure her love. Remember, you'll get nothing worth while in this life except what you pay for by work and suffering. God knows we who have won the Watauga and the Kentucky lands have paid the full price. Tell the girl frankly you must know more about her father's doings from the lips of her father."

"He'd simply rage and probably threaten to shoot me."

"I need scarcely remind you that threats won't scare a man who's just from the Shawnee country," said Sevier with a smile.

"—— it! I'll lose my chances of seeing the girl without learning anything that would help you."

"Tonpit will rage and bluster, and he'll threaten and forbid your seeing Elsie. But he won't lie about Hester; there's where he is weak as a plotter. If he saw him, he'll fume and demand what business it is of yours. Then tell him you propose to marry his daughter. She's of age. If she loves you and is worth the winning, you'll lose nothing. The other way—trying to remain neutral—leads to dishonor and the girl's contempt. When do you see her?"

"Tonight—about ten o'clock."

"I will be here waiting for you. I understand your feelings. It's natural you should feel a bit selfish. Love-making wouldn't be worth the experience if lovers weren't selfish. But Miss Elsie would scorn a man who slighted his duty. Our country comes first. If I can find out what Tonpit intends to do, if only a hint of his next move, I can make a close guess about what McGillivray wrote him. I know the Creek Nation has been ready to strike for months and has been held back until the Cherokees could be won over. Now that we're ceded to the Union and believed to be unprotected, the Cherokees favor the Creek alliance.

"Old Tassel is cunning beyond the average. He wants peace, but he'll fight to get back the French Broad lands. Tall Runner's talk was merely to show me that the Cherokees know our condition, a strong

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hint for us to vacate the French Broad lands. If we'd withdraw from the Broad and the Holston, Old Tassel would strongly oppose any alliance with the Creeks. As it now stands, we're facing the power of Spain, the enmity of the Creeks and a very probable alliance between the Creeks and the Cherokees, with the Seminoles thrown in for good measure. By heavens! It's high time we all began to be good Americans!"

"God knows I'm an American!" cried Jackson, catching the other's fervor. "I was training to be one when I first risked my hair among the Shawnees and Wyandots. Yes, Sevier, I'll give my all to block Spain."

"Good boy!" cried Sevier, and their hands met with a smack. "Now we'll go and eat."

"Stetson asked me to come there. He's offered to let me have a horse."

"Stetson is of the salt of the earth, and Mrs. Stetson has a knack of frying chicken that even makes my Kate jealous."

THE Virginian had no set purpose as, after the midday meal, he wandered to the outskirts of the settlement. He wished to be alone with his jumble of new thoughts. He had meant every word of his earnest declaration to Sevier, but there still lingered in the back of his mind the question, how much of his solemn statements had smacked of the rhetorical, and how much was based on genuine, lofty sentiments? Sevier was sure to set a listener's pulses to dancing. He developed the full strength of a man's honesty. He had played Jackson up to himself as being a hundred per cent. patriot.

Now, alone and with leisure to think it all over, Jackson feared he might be only ninety-eight per cent. patriot and two per cent. selfish lover. Yet he considered himself a good American. Hadn't he fought for the colonies? Now that only white wampum hung between America and the mother-country, hadn't he earned the right to order his life along the lines of love, to cater to the two per cent. of his make-up and create a home in the land he had helped to secure for Anglo-Saxons? Even Sevier had said love was legitimately selfish to a certain degree. But who was to determine the degree?

Chucky Jack at the age of seventeen years had married his Bonnie Kate. He had had his love and could better afford to give more of his time and strength to building up the new republic than a man who had fought for years with no opportunity for wooing a maid. And were not there many others, as fortunate as Chucky Jack, who could carry on the work?

"Wrong, wrong! All wrong!" groaned Jackson as he entered a little glade and threw himself on the ground. "Jack Sevier would never have been turned aside from his good work. Married or single, successfully wooing or rejected, nothing could come between him and what he believed to be his duty. He has vision. He sees things far ahead. He looks down the years. He's willing to sacrifice everything for results that can't be recognized until long after he's dead.

"——! Why quibble with myself? He's a bigger man than I can ever be. Even now it isn't my Americanism that stirs me so much as it is love for Elsie. Lord, if only loving Elsie constituted Americanism, I'd be the first patriot in all the land. Yet one can imitate Sevier. Maybe the unselfishness will come later."

Possibly Jackson underrated his nationalism. Certainly he had done all that a man could during the years of incessant warfare. Undoubtedly he averaged high above the status of many citizens. A proof of this was his humble realization that Washington and others who carried the torch of freedom were far above him in spiritual ideals. They were exalted to the stars, while he groped along the ground. But, so long as he knew this, there was every hope for his climbing high among the peaks of democracy.

Of course the country was in rather a chaotic state, notwithstanding the mighty labors of the giants. Congress was powerless to function in important matters unless nine States gave consent. Sovereignty was claimed by every State. While this condition existed, it is not to be wondered that a simple ranger should find it difficult to comprehend the exact essence of Americanism. The Articles of Confederation could not be changed without the consent of every State. In short, Congress could recommend but not enforce. It could borrow money but had no authority to pay it back.

It could coin money but had no authority to purchase bullion. It could make war and could not raise a soldier. With the States

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thus jealously retaining the power of initiative, it was logical that a man should identify himself by proclaiming his State citizenship. To merely say "I am an American" was to speak anonymously.

But as Jackson mulled it over with chastened mind the obscure places in his soul caught vagrant rays of light, and he marveled at the birth of new comprehensions. At first they were nebulous and vague in details. As he concentrated, they took on substance until his soul-gaze swept over a mighty panorama, as if a stupendous flash of divine fire were lighting the future and revealing what might be if the dreams of the dreamers came true.

"Just one State!" he whispered, closing his eyes to retain the picture. "By heavens, that's it! Washington has seen it! Sevier sees it! No, no! It can't be all that!"

This last, as the picture persisted in widening, sweeping over unknown rivers, leaping towering mountain ranges not yet seen by white men, and promised to include all between the rising and setting suns.

"A man would get drunk thinking on it," he muttered, rubbing his eyes as if wakening from deep sleep.

"Been takin' a snooze?" greeted a voice.

Jackson glanced up and beheld Old Thatch, owlishly contemplating him and weaving slightly from side to side in a manner that was reminiscent of tavern whisky.

Jackson sat up and scowled blackly at the old man.

"You're the fellow who objected to my kicking that cur this morning. Clear out before I forget you're a drunken old fool."

Thatch smiled forgivingly and chuckled softly. His bleared eyes were thoroughly amiable as he dropped to the ground and grunted in comfort at feeling himself securely anchored.

"Lawd, but ye did sure give Lon his needin's," he mumbled. "Reckon Polcher now wishes ye'd finished the job. Such doin's! Such doin's!"

Laying aside his animosity, Jackson surveyed him curiously.

"But Polcher and Hester are great friends," he protested.

"Mebbe yas, mebbe no. He! He!" snickered Thatch, wagging his white head knowingly. "Ye see, ye don't know what I know." And he rumbled with laughter.

"Oh, I reckon I know all you know," taunted Jackson.

"No, siree!" hotly denied Thatch. "Ye couldn't. 'Cause why? 'Cause I was the only one in the tap-room when they rowed it. I was sleepin' in the corner when their jawin' woke me up. Lawdy, but there ain't nothin' but bloody belts atween them two!"

"Oh, they're always quarreling," said Jackson with a fine show of indifference. "What else can one expect from a drunken bully and a low-down tavern-keeper."

"Sonny, ye spoke the truth in a fashion. That Polcher treated me like dirt, yes, siree! Like common dirt! An' all I asked for was a gallon. Yes, siree! Ye've hit the bull's-eye in the center. He is low-down. I'm Maryland stock. He ain't nothin' but a onery North Car'lina sand-hiller of a quarter-breed. He didn't even dast to cross the mountings till better men had gone ahead an' made a clearin'."

Then with ludicrous solemnity:

"But ye're wrong 'bout their always jawin'. They never struck fire till today. They had a clash this mornin' afore ye come, Polcher 'lowin' that Lon was too free-spoken, but it wa'n't much. But what I seen just now had murder writ all over it. They was in Polcher's little room, an' the colored boy was asleep ahind the bar. Lawdy, but I could tell things if I wanted to!" And the old reprobate hugged his knees and enjoyed his own confidences.

"Bah! Hester is always trying to stir up a fight only to find he hasn't enough guts to go through with it," sneered Jackson, yawning elaborately and making to rise.

"Don't go!" begged Thatch. "I'm hankerin' for comp'ny. It wa'n't Hester what started the trouble this time. It was Polcher. I was asleep at the first of it, but I reckon' I didn't miss much. An' ye can lay to it, it was somethin' of a eye-opener to me! Never'n my life seen Polcher like that afore. Nothin' of the tavern-keeper 'bout him. No, siree! When they come through the door of his room, he was jest out'n-out ugly. He was askin' Hester to tell what come of some job he'd sent him out on, an' Hester opined the major wouldn't thank him for peddlin' his 'fairs round tap-rooms.

"Whewee! Jest a streak of lightnin', an' Polcher had him by the throat an' a knife at his weazen! He! He! Lonny knows now how I felt when he was chuckin' me this mornin'. Ye never see a cock-o'-the-walk eat dirt an' crawl like he did. Polcher

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made him say he was jest a yaller dawg. Made him swear he'd know his master another time. Then he took off his hat an' slapped his face with it till the feather got busted. An', although Lon's throat was free of Polcher's hand when his face was bein' slapped, he stood mighty still an' lam'-like an' took it."

"And Hester told what he was asked? Tut, tut! I don't believe it," scoffed Jackson.

"Sonny, I'm older then them mountings, but I ain't no liar. No, siree! They don't breed no liars in ol' Maryland. I was wide awake an' seen it an' heard it jest as I've told. Lon knuckled under an' said he'd took the word to the major."

"Erhuh? What next?"

"Wal, that was the p'int that Polcher seen me in the corner an' quit Lon to drag me to the middle of the floor, an' it was the time I 'lowed it was best for me to act sleepy. Lon went back with him to the small room, an' it was when they come out that I asked for a gallon, promisin' to pay, an' that Polcher treated me so p'izen mean."

A PIERCING whistle penetrated the glade with the incisiveness of a war-arrow. Jackson swung about to locate the source. The effect on Thatch was quite remarkable. For one thing the whistle seemed to drive the whisky fumes from his brain and leave him sobered and horribly frightened. Scarcely able to speak, he dragged himself to Jackson and huskily whispered:

"Go, go! Keep shet on what I've said. It's Polcher's whistle. He's lookin' for me. If he sees me with ye, he'll opine I've been blabbin'. He'll cut my throat, jest as sure as he promised to cut Hester's. Oh, Gawd! He's comin'!"

Jackson took him by the shoulder and shook him violently and murmured:

"Stop it, you fool. Pretend to be asleep. Polcher won't see me." And, picking up his rifle, he glided into the bushes.

The whistle sounded again, shrilling on the ear most unpleasantly. Jackson maneuvered with the stealth he had acquired in stalking the Shawnees and soon located the tavern-keeper. From behind a tree he saw Polcher, still wearing his soiled apron, slowly advancing toward him, his eyes shifting from side to side and with nothing of a landlord's urbanity showing in his face. Jackson remained motionless, determined if discovered to see that Polcher did not find the old man. Polcher advanced several feet, then pursed his lips and repeated his signal. Thatch's voice querulously called out:

"What'n sin ye want now? Can't a man git a little sleep?"

Turning aside, Polcher strode through the undergrowth and into the glade. Jackson slipped along after him until he saw him stop and stand before Thatch.

"What are you doing here?" gently asked Polcher, studying the old man keenly.

"Tryin' to forgit ye wouldn't let me have a leetle rye," sullenly answered Thatch.

"The stranger, the one called Jackson, walked this way. Have you seen him?"

Old Thatch stupidly blinked his eyes and shook his head.

"Ain't seen hide nor hair of him. Want me to find him?"

"No. Tell me what you thought of Hester's talk back in the tavern." This was put in an ingratiating voice, but Jackson noted the hand under the apron was clasping the hilt of a knife, and he insured Thatch against an unpolitic answer by drawing a bead on the boniface.

But Thatch, sober, possessed an animal's instinct and smelled the trap.

"That Lon Hester's a derned fool. Wish some one would comb him," he growled. "See how he choked me this mornin'? By Gawdfrey! Take it a few years back an' he wouldn't be wearin' no rooster's feathers round this yere settlement. Almost wish we'd let the stranger muss him up. Reckon the new feller could do it, at that."

"I mean, about what he said to me," quietly corrected Polcher, drawing a step nearer, both hands under his apron now.

"Lawd, he didn't go for to give ye any lip, did he?" cried Thatch. "If he did, ye was a fool to take it. Lem'me tell ye somethin', Polcher, that mebbe ye don't know. Lon Hester's fightin' nerve is mighty poor quality. He's low-down. If ever he gives ye any lip, jest ye comb him. Why, if I was a bit younger, I'd mount him in a second. Makes we feel wolfish round the head an' shoulders to see that feller carry on so an' make his betters step aside. Now, 'cause ye keep a tavern, he 'lows he can bully ye. But if ye'll jest swing a bottle ag'in his chuckle-head he'll be as meek as a rabbit."

He ran out of breath and paused. Polcher frowned slightly, withdrew one hand and

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rubbed his chin doubtfully. Jackson hugely admired the old man's dissimulation and lowered his rifle.

"I thought you heard him giving me some lip when you woke up," mused Polcher. "I intended to ask you about it, but you was gone before I remembered. I want you to promise me you'll say nothing about it. If the other fellows knew he'd made cheap talk to me, it might set them all doing the same thing. And I have it hard enough as it is."

Old Thatch avoided this trap also and replied:

"But I never heard nothin'. But I do still opine ye didn't treat me very friendly when I only asked for a gallon. I know where a Injun has some furs hid, an' I'd have fetched 'em to ye tonight. Ye might 'a' took that chance on a old customer."

Polcher laughed with his lips, making no sound, and slowly withdrew his right hand from the apron and folded his arms.

"See here, Thatch," he softly began, "that gallon is yours and several more if you fetch me the furs—but leave the Injun."

"Leave the Injun?"

"Exactly. Leave him so he'll stay just where you leave him."

"Ye mean for me to kill him?" hoarsely asked Thatch.

"Well, I'm quarter-blood, but I don't like Injuns," murmured Polcher.

"But that would bring a war-party ag'in us," the old man protested.

"What's that to you, you old coward? You wouldn't have to do any fighting. You're afraid," growled Polcher.

"'Fraid of a Injun! Huh! Like ——!" wrathfully retorted Thatch.

"Now listen to me. If you blab a word, you'll never blab another. I've changed my mind about the furs. I don't want them. Bring a scalp and get your jug."

"I ain't got a tender stomach when it comes to Injuns. But this cuss is a friendly one. Lives near here. It would be like killin' a neighbor. I—I can't do it," cried Thatch, his old face now running sweat.

"Then I've made a mistake and talked to the wrong man. It's your hair or the Injun's before midnight."

"It means war on the Watauga cabins," whined Thatch.

"That's nothing to you. A single word of this to any one and I'll first prove you're a drunken old liar, and then I'll cut your throat. Now, I'm going back and fill that jug."

With this gruesome warning Polcher made for the settlement. Jackson kept concealed, curious to see what Thatch would do. He knew the old man would have no great compunctions about killing an Indian. It was the after-effects he dreaded, the prospects of his white hair flying from a Cherokee belt.

Polcher's purpose was clear; he wished to precipitate trouble between the Cherokees and the Watauga men. A mighty danger hung over the settlements; it would only require a Cherokee slain by a white man to bring the danger crashing down. Once committed to a campaign of vengeance, the Cherokee Nation would gladly accept the war-belt offered by McGillivray and his Creeks, and Charles III, of Spain, would decide he held winning cards.

Thatch remained motionless until Polcher was out of sight and hearing; then with a muttered curse he picked up his rifle and shuffled toward the ancient Indian trail which led to the south. Jackson followed to prevent the murder. The prospective victim must live nearby, according to Thatch's words. He would be one of Old Tassel's warriors, friendly to the whites and willing to dwell on the edge of their civilization. Mumbling under his breath, Thatch followed the trail only a short distance before leaving it for the forest. Jackson was now at his heels, wondering if he were fully decided to commit the crime.

The old man stopped close to the trail and sat down on a log and rested his rifle on some dead brush and stared intently at his feet. Jackson watched his face and saw his great weakness gradually conquer. Thatch was picturing the endless procession of jugs one scalp would buy. By degrees his aged eyes grew bright with resolution, and the lips under the beard ceased trembling.

"What's a Injun more or less?" he grunted, stooping for his rifle and slipping and plunging both arms deep into the brush.

He began mouthing profanity but suddenly desisted and stared as if deathstruck. Jackson was greatly puzzled at this extraordinary behavior. From a decision to do murder he had inexplicably dropped into the depths of terror. The watery eyes were round and fixed; the arms, still buried nearly to the shoulders, were

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rigid and straining. Then, very slowly, the arms were withdrawn, while the eyes, as if pulled by a magnet, slowly turned downward.

Jackson nearly betrayed himself when three hands instead of only two emerged from the brush.

"He's stumbled on to the dead Creek—McGillivray's messenger!" gasped Jackson under his breath.

Incredulously the old man glared at the dead hand his living hands had found under the brush. For nearly a minute he remained with his gaze fixed; then a cunning expression crept over his base face, and he turned his head in all directions to make sure he was unobserved. Satisfied he was alone with the dead brave, he grunted and growled like an animal worrying its prey and drew his knife and reaching deep into the brush, worked with feverish haste.

IT LACKED an hour of ten o'clock when Jackson finished trailing Thatch to his lonely cabin. After completing his horrid business, Thatch had proceeded to an isolated Indian hut and hung about near the clearing waiting for an opportunity to steal the furs. Polcher had told him the furs were not necessary, but possibly the old man planned to palm off the scalp as having belonged to the owner of the pelts and thus doubly insure his supply of strong drink. But the Indian owner had remained near his cabin door, and as the shadows gathered the old man sought his cabin.

Jackson had planned to follow Thatch until he went for his whisky, but as time pressed he abandoned his purpose and hurried back to find Sevier. He was much chagrined to find no candle burning in the court-house. If he was to keep his appointment with Elsie, he could not waste any time looking for his friend. He hesitated for a moment, then set off for the Tonpit cabin.

He stood at the edge of the clearing just as the moon climbed above the forest crown. The cabin was dark, and a hush hung over the place. He proceeded to the arbor and softly called her name. Even as he paused for her to answer, he was convinced she would not come. Not only did the clearing and the cabin exhale the atmosphere of something abandoned, but the queer fancy obsessed him that life had never dwelt there; that his meeting with the girl in the morning hours was a dream.

He had promised her he would not seek her at the house, and he had assured Sevier he would seek her father there. The silence was oppressive and grew upon him and his first feeling, which was of sadness, gave place for alarm.

Groping his way to the log, he brushed it with his fingers and was rewarded by finding a scrap of paper. This should have brought him happiness and should have dispelled his morbid imaginings, for it proved she had been there a short time since and, therefore, must even now be in the cabin. The effect on his melancholy was quite the contrary; it savored more of some memento of old, dead days, like the finding of a keepsake in the débris of ancient things.

"Idiot!" he snarled at himself. "One would think I was bewitched. Elsie has been here and left a word for me. Now to see what she has to say."

He hastened out into the thin moonlight and essayed to read the paper but was baffled. It was maddening to know he must wait until he reached a cabin light before he could know her message. It was a small, irregular piece of paper, suggesting it had been torn hurriedly from a larger piece. This in itself, betokening great haste or need of secrecy, was disquieting. He turned, eager to reach a light, then remembered his word to Sevier. Thrusting the paper into his hunting-shirt, he strode through the clumps of shrubbery and made for the cabin.

Elsie had said her father retired to his room at this hour but not to sleep. He walked the floor much of the night, but no light shone in the cabin. To make sure, Jackson made a circuit of the house before approaching the door. Then as he raised his hand to rap his first premonition of emptiness came back to him. He pounded lustily and gained no heed. The cabin was dead. He seized the latch-string only to drop it. He knew he could gain an entrance easily. Tonpit would not bother to lock the house.

If Sevier were correct in his surmises, the thieves in the settlement would respect the place as belonging to a friend of McGillivray. Honest men would not intrude. But what would it profit for him to enter? He had no light, and he doubted if a crumb of fire would be burning in the fireplace

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now it was July. His fumbling hands would find many reminders of the girl, and he needed no more than his heart now held.

Turning away, he regained the trail and hastened back to the settlement. As he approached each cabin, he pulled forth the paper, hoping to find a lighted window outside of which he could pause and read his message. The settlers, however, retired early in the Watauga region, and each cabin was a squat, dark mass. But ahead there did gleam a light, a tiny beacon, and he knew Sevier was awaiting his return to the court-house.

He ran swiftly and noiselessly and without pausing to announce himself pushed open the door and jumped across the threshold. Sevier was seated at the table, his right elbow resting on it, his hand gripping a long pistol, the muzzle of which covered the door.

"You, Jackson!" he softly exclaimed, dropping the pistol. "You come as if the devil was after you."

"There's no one in the Tonpit house. She left a message for me, and I haven't had a chance to read it," panted Jackson, snatching up a candle and holding it close to the paper. Sevier watched his face closely and saw the dark features change from a frown of perplexity to a scowl of understanding.

"Read!" choked Jackson, restoring the candle to the table and dropping the note.

Sevier bowed over it and read—

Little Talassee.

"——!" gasped Jackson, wiping his wet face. "Little Talassee! Where McGillivray, Emperor of the Creeks, lives!"

The writing was a mere scrawl, as if the girl had but a moment.

"It was a surprize to her," murmured Sevier. "She wasn't prepared for it. They started immediately after her father gave the word. Of course he went with her. He isn't entirely an idiot."

"But why? Why?" was Jackson's agonized query.

Sevier rose and paced to the window and back, his brows wrinkled in perplexity. But when he halted at the table again, the furrows on his forehead were ironed out. Placing a hand on Jackson's shoulder, he said:

"I think I have it. The Creek messenger brought a talk for Tonpit, a writing from McGillivray. Both McGillivray and Tonpit knew what the Legislature intended to do. Tonpit was here to be on the ground. His reward was to be great if he influenced the bulk of the settlers to submit peacefully to Spain's rule. But McGillivray, in putting everything at stake, feared Tonpit would not stand firm. So, I believe, his message was to demand a hostage, a guarantee that Tonpit would see the matter through to the end. He demanded the girl as the hostage. Her father consented."

"Good God! Impossible! His own daughter!" choked Jackson.

"Wait a bit. Alexander McGillivray is very much the gentleman. In case of an Indian war, the girl is safer with him than she is in Jonesboro. He won't harm her. She remains his guest while her father carries out his end of the bargain. The messenger sent the writing to Tonpit through one of the tavern crowd——"

"Hester!"

"But, instead of turning and making tracks for home once the message was delivered, the Creek waited. He came stealthily and even avoided the Cherokee towns. Why should he invite discovery by hanging around on the edge of Jonesboro? Because he was waiting to guide Tonpit and the girl back to the Coosa River. I've been down and looked the ground over. He was killed while sitting in a clump of bushes. His slayer's trail entered the woods from this settlement and then returned here. I followed it both ways until it was lost in the beaten path. Hubbard did it, all right."

Jackson then rapidly told of his meeting with Thatch, the quarrel between Hester and Polcher and the latter's bargain for a Cherokee scalp and Thatch's substitution of the Creek's hair.

Sevier heard him through in silence until he described the taking of the scalp. Then the borderer exclaimed aloud and cried—

"That's more important than the disappearance of the girl!"

"John Sevier——"

"No, no. Calm yourself! Miss Elsie will be safe in McGillivray's town. But, if it's known a peaceful Cherokee has been murdered, we'll have Old Tassel's three thousand savages joining with Watts without waiting for any help from the Creeks. That will be the chance McGillivray has been waiting for—and the Lord help the

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Watauga, the Holston and the French Broad and poor John Robertson down on the Cumberland!"

"But no Cherokee will be missing, let alone be dead. It's a Creek that furnishes the scalp," reminded Jackson.

"And we can't afford to have the Creek's murder known any better than we could a Cherokee's," cried Sevier. "McGillivray would never forgive the slaying of his messenger. The office is almost sacred. —— Hubbard for getting us into such a mess! Oh, why didn't I examine the brush-pile when down there! I found it easy enough but thought it could wait till I had more time. Time? Every second fights against us!"

"If Major Hubbard hadn't killed the Creek, then Thatch would have wiped out a Cherokee. It's six of one and half a dozen of the other."

"Not so. You would have stopped Thatch. But we're wasting time. Make for the tavern. If Thatch isn't in Polcher's room in the back end toward the garden, he hasn't arrived. You must hold him up and take the scalp from him."

"And you?"

"I'm off to do what I should have done before—bury the Creek where none will find him. Report to me here. Remember what is at stake!"

"I'm an American," growled Jackson, snatching up his rifle and gliding from the room.

THE tap-room of the tavern contained half a dozen patrons, who sat along the walls in silence, as if waiting. A mulatto boy presided over the bar. There were none of the usual loungers outside the door, and the door was closed. By these signs Jackson knew Polcher had dismissed all but a trusty few so as to leave a clear path for Old Thatch. Pausing only long enough to make sure Hester was not in the tap-room, the ranger skirted the zone of light and gained the garden at the rear.

There was a light in the room, but Jackson could not make out any occupants. From his position a man on either side of the room would be out of range. To make sure Thatch was not already there, he dropped behind some currant bushes and commenced crawling to one side. His maneuver was halted by the sudden appearance of Polcher's figure blocking the window.

Then came the devilish whistle that carried the edge of a lance, and Jackson was startled and chagrined to hear a feeble reply back of him. Steps shuffled nearer, and the young Virginian knew he had lost his chance of intercepting Thatch. However, the game was not lost. The old man would deliver his ghastly trophy, and the next play would be to vault through the window and take it away from the tavern-keeper.

"Can't see a derned thing facin' the light," croaked the complaining voice of Thatch.

"*Sss!* You fool!" hissed Polcher, placing the candle on the floor so that it fed up against his ferocious face but no longer blinded the gaze of his tool. "Come close. I've cleared the babblers from the tap-room, but it's best even they should not see you. I have the jug here, filled. Have you the price?"

"I've fetched the price," shivered Thatch, and he passed within three feet of Jackson in making for the window.

"Good! Good!" softly applauded Polcher. "I knew you had the right stuff in you."

"I—I couldn't git no furs!" huskily confessed Thatch.

"You brought the other?" anxiously demanded Polcher.

"It's here in my shirt."

"Then —— the furs and hand over."

"Here she be, but I'm mighty onnerved. Kindly pass out the jug afore I drop. I feel like the devil's been taggin' every one of my steps. Ugh!"

"Just a minute," mumbled Polcher, ducking from Jackson's view in bending close to the light.

"I tell ye I need some licker now," insisted Thatch. "I feel dretful sick. I can see all sorts of critters right beside me."

"Hush, you fool!" gritted Polcher, raising his head. "Here, I'll hold it. Drink!" There came a protracted gurgling, followed by a deep sigh of content.

"Reckon now I'm game to face all the devils atween the Watauga an' the Cumberland," declared Thatch. "Gim'me my jug."

"Not so fast," muttered Polcher. "Stand close to the window. I'm going to lift the light long enough to see you ain't covered with blood. That would give the whole game away."

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"There ain't a speck on me," proudly assured Thatch, leaning against the sill.

Polcher lifted the candle for a moment and briefly examined the head and shoulders of the old man, then dropped to the floor again.

"Ye're a —— of a long time payin' over that jug," grumbled Thatch. "I want to be gittin' back to my cabin. Goin' to make a night of it. Reg'lar old blue devil comes out an' grins at me—lives in the fireplace. Keeps yappin' for me to make the fire hotter'n hotter. That is, he does when I have 'nough whisky."

Polcher reappeared above the sill and seized Thatch by the arm and hoarsely accused:

"What the devil does this mean? This ain't a prime, fresh scalp. It's more'n a dozen hours old."

"What ye tryin' to make out now, Polcher," choked Thatch, striving in vain to keep his terror from showing.

Polcher maintained his grip on the old man's arm while he ducked his head for another study of the scalp. Then with a smothered oath he hissed—

"Creek hair! You——"

"Don't! Don't!" pleaded Thatch, his voice squealing. And he sought to tear his arm loose.

Polcher held him firmly and stared with lack-luster eyes into the frightened face for nearly a minute. His gaze seemed to exert a hypnotic influence on the wretch, for the struggling ceased, and the pleading stopped.

"Now tell me where you got a Creek scalp," gently commanded Polcher.

Mumblingly and often inaudible to the eavesdropper behind the currant bushes, Thatch blurted out his story of having found a warrior buried under some brush. The man had been dead only a few hours, and he supposed it was a Cherokee.

"It was atween the three black oaks an' a clump of poplars," he explained. "An' I couldn't see why his sculp wasn't jest as good as if I'd done for him."

"It's just as good," slowly replied Polcher. "It's much better. And the Watauga will pay the price when McGillivray hears of it. His messenger killed by the settlers! By the Almighty, but won't he rage! And I know who killed him and scalped him, and we'll prove it."

"Polcher! Ye don't go for to throw me, do ye?" whispered Thatch.

Polcher laughed.

"None of my friends did this."

Thatch began to understand and faltered.

"Chucky Jack?"

"Think I'm a fool?" No one so high as that."

"Promise me it ain't me," groaned Thatch, his fears returning.

"No one so low as you, old friend."

"—— an' brimstone! Spit it out, Polcher. Ye make me think of that big blue devil in my fireplace! What's the idee?"

"I have six witnesses in the tap-room who'll swear that from a distance they saw you try to stop the murderer from killing the Creek; that, after he had killed and scalped his victim, he chased you into the woods to prevent you from blabbing."

"Good!" ejaculated Thatch, his form straightening.

"They'll swear that they came and told me and that we were about to go out and search for you and the murderer, when you came running here, chased by the scoundrel."

"Hold on!" spluttered Thatch. "What's that 'bout him tryin' to ketch me? Of course he didn't ketch me, did he?"

"Yes!" softly cried Polcher, darting his body half out the window to secure room for knife-play.

It was over before Jackson dreamed of what the finale was to be. With a low groan the old man fell to the ground, and the tavern-keeper's figure was drawn inside the window like some monstrous spider retiring to its lair.

With a wild shout of rage Jackson leaped to his feet and discharged his rifle into the room a fraction of a second after Polcher had dropped below the sill. The report had hardly jarred the night calm before the landlord was raising his head to glimpse the ranger's distorted visage almost at the window. Darting to the door opening into the tap-room, Polcher threw it back and screamed:

"Help! Help! Surround the building! Jackson, the ranger, just killed Old Thatch in the garden! Jackson killed an Indian. Thatch saw him and he followed the old man here to stop his telling me! Back of the building and head him off if he takes to the woods!"

Nonplussed, incapable of intelligent thinking for a moment, Jackson stood with empty gun while Polcher shouted his terrible

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accusations. Then came the rush of swift feet, and the young Virginian knew Polcher's creatures had been kept in waiting for just such work. He knew Thatch would have been killed in any event and the alarm given that Kirk Jackson had done for him.

Retreating from the garden, he worked his way toward the court-house, only to observe lights springing up in the nearest cabins, the inmates being alarmed by the rifle-shot and the loud cries of Polcher and his men. Jackson dodged one of the tavern posse and escaped discovery by a hair-breadth. The court-house was dark, Sevier had not returned. To wait for him and withstand the temper of Polcher's creatures was out of the question. At the midday meal Stetson had repeated his offer of a horse, urging him to select an animal from the log corral any time.

Five mintes after escaping the garden he was well down the trail back of the court-house and leading a horse from the pen.

Another five minutes and Sevier came face to face with a group of citizens in front of the court-house. Some of them carried torches. Among them were several of Polcher's men; some were honest men.

"What's all this confusion about?" demanded Sevier. "One would think there was an Indian raid on."

"Yer friend, Kirk Jackson, has killed a friendly Injun!" roared a tavern man.

"Prove that, and we shall have to hang Mr. Jackson," Sevier promptly replied. "But, if any one tries any promiscuous hanging, he'll dangle from an oak limb just as sure as I'm called Nolichucky Jack. Burn that fact into your brains. We belong to no State now. Until we've arranged some form of government, I'm the law. Let a hair of Jackson's head be harmed before his guilt is proven and I'll hang the offender. And the first man to tread air will be Polcher, the tavern-keeper. Now we'll hear the evidence."

CHAPTER IV

FOR WATAUGA AND AMERICA

WHILE some of the men, notably those under the influence of Polcher, pressed the search for Jackson, others heeded Sevier's request and repaired to the court-house to conduct an inquiry into the tragedy. There was none so simple-minded as not to realize that the death of either Creek or Cherokee might precipitate a bloody war. With Spain in league with the Creek Nation, it was only the pacific tendency of Old Tassel that had restrained the Cherokees under his immediate control. There were other thousands of Cherokees who only waited for a strong incentive to send them into line with the Creeks.

The five lower towns on the western frontier of the Cherokee country, including Creeks, Shawnees and white renegades as well as the original Cherokee founders, lusted and clamored for battle. John Watts and Dragging Canoe, their leaders, only waited to augment their numbers before striking. To start the riot of bloodshed and burning cabins it only required some isolated act such as the unprovoked slaying of an Indian near a white settlement. For two years the situation had been shaping up. If ever Spain was to establish an empire by force in America, no fairer opportunity could exist than the present.

Of course there was Old Thatch's death to be investigated, but aside from his tavern cronies there were few to lament his passing. His demise could be considered leisurely; it carried no train of red axes. The murder of the Indian was epochal. The settlers assembled in the court-house viewed the situation objectively. Whether the dead be Creek or Cherokee, his people would seek reprisal. Sevier's vision carried him beyond the Watauga. He saw the destiny of the new world about to unfold. The vast western country was unexplored except as half-civilized forest-rangers penetrated depths they could not comprehend.

The door to this unknown region was closed, and Sevier knew it must soon open and reveal a home-maker's paradise. Bold men in Kentucky had glimpsed the marvelous possibilities. Now was the crisis; an Indian's death might be the hinge on which the door would swing to admit either imperial Spain or democratic America. Could it be kept shut a bit longer, until Chucky Jack had summoned the faithful, then let it open as widely as it would and Spain face her answer.

"Where's this man Jackson?" asked a settler.

"Probably dodging the mob. He'll appear when he knows he can have a fair hearing," said Sevier. Then to a man near

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the door, "Stetson, go and find Polcher. He doesn't seem to be here."

As the messenger departed, Sevier began scribbling on the back of his petition. The men believed he was setting down the known facts of the double killing. Had they glanced over his shoulder they would have read:

Isaac Shelby, Geo. Rogers Clark and Benj. Logan will raise 5,000 men in Ky.
Arthur Campbell will be good for 3,000 more in southwest Va.
Robertson can surely bring 1,000 from the Cumberland.
Elijah Clarke can raise at least 5,000 in northern Georgia.
We are good for 3,000.
Tot. 17,000 rifles—if we have time.

He studied the list thoughtfully and nodded approval. Give him a few inches of time time before the storm broke, and he would stake his soul on the American manhood of the seventeen thousand riflemen he had listed. If Spain and her tools could be held off for a few months, then the Western door would swing back to allow men in buckskin to file through and take possession. He drummed on the table idly, then tore off a strip of paper containing his notes and fed it to a candle. With the exception of George Rogers Clark, all the men on the list had fought with him, some under his command.

"Didn't know your friend was so keen set ag'in Injuns, Jack," spoke up a gray-beared man, an honest if simple fellow.

"It's his fightin' ag'in the Shawnees," declared a tavern lounger.

"Kirk Jackson has killed too many Indians in open warfare to have to slay them by murder," growled Sevier. "We won't convict till we've heard the evidence. We haven't any proof yet that an Indian has been killed. After that's shown it will be time enough to name the slayer."

"Polcher's got the proof. He'll be here in a second," cried a voice.

Sevier rose and strolled to the door, his manner calm but his nerves inclined to jump. Through the doorway he had glimpsed the face of Major Hubbard, and he feared lest the Indian-hater should enter and boldly announce his bloody coup. Standing so as to block the gaze of those behind him, he caught Hubbard by the shoulder and whispered:

"The devil's to pay! Your one dead Indian may bring death to many women and children. Let no one know you did it. You'd better go away until it's over. I'm hoping I can stave it off—that they won't find the body."

Hubbard hesitated, then the feeble wail of a child from some cabin struck to his heart, and with a shudder he slipped back into the darkness just in time to avoid being seen by a group of men carrying torches. As the men drew up to the door, Sevier saw they had brought the silent form of Thatch on a stretcher of rifles.

Sevier stepped aside and the men filed in and deposited the body on the floor before the table and took their seats. Polcher remained standing until Sevier returned to the table, when he approached and placed the Creek scalp before Sevier. The borderer bowed abstractedly and waited for the tavern-keeper to retire.

"We will now open the inquiry into the death of Amos Thatch," announced Sevier. "Polcher, what do you know about it?"

POLCHER stood up and testified: "I was in my room, with a colored boy tending the bar. I was figuring up my accounts when I heard my name spoken softly and looked up to see poor Thatch's face at the window. He seemed to be badly frightened. I thought it was nerves, the need of a drink. I picked up a jug and gave him a drink. The liquor seemed to straighten him out, and he told me he was trying to escape the man called Kirk Jackson. He said he had come upon Jackson down the trail and that Jackson was ripping the hair off an Indian he had just shot——"

"Did he say he saw him shoot him?" broke in Sevier.

"I don't think so. He talked fast and was much frightened. I remember he said the shot attracted his attention. He was lying down, had been asleep. He got up and saw Jackson scalping the Indian. I take it for granted he didn't see the shot, although he must have been very close. Of course his story was more or less broken up. I'm only giving the substance of it. He said he cried out and asked Jackson why he killed the Indian and risked bringing on a war. Jackson sprang to his feet and snapped his rifle at him, forgetting he hadn't reloaded it.

"Poor Thatch then ran for his life with Jackson after him. He knew Jackson

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would catch him if he didn't hide. He managed to dart into a hollow tree. Knowing Jackson would kill him to prevent his being a witness against him, the old man kept in hiding till long after dark. If he could make my place without being seen, he knew I would protect him. His talk was wild because of his fear. He insisted he was followed, that Jackson was right behind him. He wanted to crawl through the window. Poor old Thatch! If I'd only let him in through the window! But I thought it was all nonsense.

"He'd been drinking too much the last few days, and only this morning I refused to let him have some whisky. I told him to pass round to the tap-room door and I'd see that no one harmed him. He started to do so when some one jumped him from behind the currant-bushes. The old man must have lost his head, for instead of running up to the window he stood in his tracks as if paralyzed. Then he yelled out, and I knew he'd got it.

"I climbed through the window and Jackson saw me and fired. I called to the men, and they came on the run. We got lights and found where Jackson hid behind the bushes. The tracks of his Shawnee moccasins are very plain. You can see them for yourself. It was at that spot we found the scalp I've given you. I think that's all."

"Very connectedly told," murmured Sevier, rapidly making some notes. "Did you see Jackson to recognize him?"

"I did. After I leaped through the window he started toward me, then heard the men coming and thought better of it. I saw his face plainly."

"That would seem to prove the killing of Thatch," mused Sevier, rising and advancing with a candle to the body.

He held the candle close and superficially examined the location of the wound and measured the cut in the soiled hunting-shirt. Returning to the table he asked—

"Are there any witnesses to the killing of the Indian?"

One of the tavern characters stood up and awkwardly bobbed his head.

"Job Twill," greeted Sevier. "Tell what you know."

Twill began:

"Me'n two other fellers was down on the trail an' seen this Jackson crawlin' toward the three black oaks. We watched, 'lowin' he was goin' to bag a deer. Then we see a Injun stick his head out of some bushes, an' this yere Jackson cuss fired. Almost the same time we seen poor Thatch come through the bushes an' go into the bushes after Jackson. Afore we could git to thinkin' straight, old Thatch busted back into sight, runnin' his old legs off, with Jackson poundin' after him. That's all we seen."

"Who were the two men with you?"

"Lon Hester 'n Bert Price. They're out huntin' for the murderer now."

"I see. You were in the tavern this morning when Jackson had trouble with Hester?"

"I was there when he picked a row with Hester," growled the witness.

"They laid aside their weapons?"

"Yes, 'cause Polcher wouldn't have any killin'. Hester threw his knife on the bar, an' Jackson hung his ax an' pistol on his rifle. That is, he hung his belt holdin' em on the rifle."

"Can you describe the pistol?"

"Long one, with the bar'el all scarred up, like it had been banged round a lot."

"Good for you, Twill. You've got a sharp eye. What about the ax?"

"Ahem!" broke in Polcher, trying to catch the witness' eye but unable to do so because Twill stood in front of him. "I think——"

"I think you'll be lying beside Mr. Thatch if you interrupt these proceedings with another word!" roared Sevier, covering the tavern-keeper with his pistol. Then to the startled witness, "Go on, Twill."

"Th' ax wa'n't a common trade ax. It was made for real work, extry strong an' the handle showed hard wear," faltered the witness, feeling Polcher's gaze boring into the back of his head but not daring to look back.

"Excellent!" heartily approved Sevier. "Give me a thousand men with your eyes and memory and I'd ask help of neither State nor Congress. But we must get along faster. Now describe the knife."

"There wa'n't no knife," the witness promptly answered.

A faint growl of rage from Polcher and a wide smile from Sevier warned the witness his patron was displeased with his evidence. Half turning his head and entirely missing the cue Polcher's savage gaze was seeking to convey to him, he persisted:

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"Don't ye remember, Polcher, when he hung his belt on the rifle, it held only a ax an' pistol an' that there wa'n't no loop for a knife? One of the boys spoke about it after he went out that it was queer he didn't carry no knife. An' Price said he might 'a' killed lots of Injuns but without a knife he couldn't 'a' took any——"

Too late he saw the trap he had been led into, and with a terrified stare at the ominous-eyed tavern-keeper he halted and bit his lips, then glared helplessly at Sevier.

"Without a knife he couldn't take any scalps," completed Sevier. "In spots, Twill, you're an honest witness. You speak the truth when you forget. Kirk Jackson carried no knife when he came to Jonesboro. What is more, he always fought honorably and did not scalp. Polcher made a mistake in thinking he recognized him. Amos Thatch was killed with a knife, a broad-bladed knife, not a hunting-knife. Jackson never killed him. Now, Twill. No, no; look at me. Now, sir, you dare tell Nolichucky Jack Sevier that you and Hester and Price saw Jackson shoot an Indian? Be careful. I've hung horsethieves in Jonesboro. I'll hang you for a liar before morning if you don't tell the truth."

Twill turned a ghastly white and licked his lips frantically. In the blazing eyes of Sevier he saw the noose if he were caught bearing false witness. He knew Polcher's cruel gaze was warning him his days were numbered unless he persisted in his story. But Sevier had meted border justice to several of Twill's cronies.

"I—I may have been mistook," he faltered, gulping out the words with difficulty and knowing he must leave the Watauga country before morning if he valued his life. "It was a right smart distance off. Mebbe it wa'n't Jackson. I'd —I'd been drinkin' hard."

"Maybe you didn't see anything. Just dreamed it?" suggested Sevier.

With a low groan Twill made complete surrender before the compelling gaze and desperately cried out:

"I reckon so. Jest dreamed it. An' I want to git out of here."

Sevier nodded toward the door. As Twill made for it, Polcher sprang to his feet as if to follow him. Sevier raised the pistol and warned:

"Not another step, Polcher." Then humorously, "I'll have no tampering with the witness."

Polcher returned to his seat and quietly promised—

"The red war-club will be lifted up for this, Sevier."

"*Hayi! Yu!*" sneered Sevier, using the introduction of the sacred formula for going to war. "I know your heart well. You wait and long to hear the red war-whoop, but your soul shall become blue. So shall it be." Then to the others, "It's time now, my friends, to visit the spot where this Indian is said to have been killed."

"Said to have been killed?" choked Polcher. "And the poor devil's scalp is before you on that table."

Sevier picked it up and examined it curiously and invited:

"Stetson, you know scalps and Indians. Come up here."

THE settler advanced and bowed his broad shoulders over the table and held the scalp up to the candle and examined it closely. Then in surprize:

"This ain't no fresh scalp. It was took from a Injun who'd been dead for hours. Huh! Looks like it was took off by a blind man. No border-man would scalp like that. Besides, the Injun was so long dead no blood come. What kind of a game is this, anyway?" And he turned and glared angrily at the tavern-keeper.

"So much for Stetson. And he knows what he is talking about," said Sevier. "Now we'll take torches and go down the trail to where the Indian was killed. The three oaks make the spot easy to find."

"I can lead you there in the dark," Stetson assured.

"But we'll carry lighted torches, and Polcher will go with us," Sevier significantly ruled.

And the mixed-blood knew the words contained a threat.

"I'll be glad to go," stoutly declared the tavern-keeper. "I want this thing cleared up as much as any one does. All I know about it is what I've told. Thatch's story prepared me to see Jackson when the old man was killed. Perhaps I made a mistake, but, if I did, it was an honest one. The knife part doesn't prove Jackson innocent, for he could have picked up a knife anywhere."

"True," agreed Sevier softly, "but I'm

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surprized he should pick up a butcher-knife. And Twill's story——"

"I'm not responsible for that," hotly broke in Polcher, ignoring the reference to the mortal weapon. "He heard me tell the boys what I'd been told and had seen. He up and told me his story. I supposed it was the truth. It looks now as if he wanted to appear important."

Nor did Polcher believe his scheme had failed. If Jackson escaped his net, there still remained the big, vital objective—the precipitation of war between the reds and whites. The plot to implicate Jackson had been at the most a by-play to satisfy Polcher's hate for Sevier. He would have struck him by striking his friend. But, so far as the real purpose was concerned, it mattered not whether Jackson or Thatch was believed guilty of the killing.

All Polcher asked was for the news to spread that a Creek had been murdered. He had originally planned to assassinate a Cherokee, but the Creek fitted in just as pleasingly. Therefore it was with genuine alacrity that he caught up a torch and took a place beside Sevier at the end of the little procession.

Stetson took the lead. Polcher walked in silence beside the borderer for a minute and then gravely asked—

"What's to become of us, John, now that the mother State has cast us off?"

"We're not entirely orphaned," Sevier retorted. "We can rap on the door of the central Government, and, as a separate State, say, 'Here is your child.' "

"But will the Government take us in? Can it protect us?"

"If it can't protect us, it doesn't make any difference whether it takes us in or doesn't. We can keep on shifting for ourselves as we've always done."

"I sometimes think you misunderstand me and my motives," Polcher regretted.

"Never!" emphatically assured Sevier with a broad smile.

"All I want to do is my duty by the settlers on this side of the mountains," Polcher warmly declared.

"Our first duty is to see that the settlers in this valley and those on the Holston and French Broad are not wiped out by that red ax you said was coming."

"I spoke foolishly," sighed Polcher. "I only meant that the killing of this Indian would make trouble. You and I are one in wanting to save the settlements. Why not accept aid where we can find it?"

"From over the water? Already we've stood more from Spain than we ever endured from the mother country. If we didn't want a separate existence, why did we go through a war that's left us bankrupt?"

"We could accept help till we're strong enough to strike out for ourselves," insisted Polcher.

"The man who'd sell us to Spain would next be selling us to the devil," Sevier sharply retorted. "As for strength, we're strong enough now to send a red ax to every Indian nation in the South—and another to Charles III."

Polcher knew this was said for rhetorical effect and did not represent Sevier's true belief. But he took the words seriously and argued:

"I can't see that. Other men, bigger than me, can't see it, either."

"Meaning Tonpit."

"You named him; not me. There are men over the mountains, who stand very high, who believe it would be our salvation from the Western Indians if we had Spain at our back."

"Spain at our back today means Spain at our throats tomorrow."

"Bosh! Then there are the Northern Indians. When you get a war-belt from Cherokee and Creek, you'll get others from the Ohio tribes. Just now the friendship of Piomingo, the Chickasaw chief, for Robertson holds that tribe back. But what if Robertson dies or Piomingo dies? What will hold the tribe back then? And, as the Chickasaws go, so go the Choctaws, seven thousand in round numbers."

"We haven't come to that trail yet."

"But it's only a step ahead. How can the Western settlements get anywhere or do anything under the present Government? We're shut off from the seaboard. Spain controls every mile of the Mississippi. Our tobacco rots on the ground. We're hemmed in. If we accepted Spain's friendly offer, we could ship our tobacco down the Mississippi and sell it in New Orleans for ten dollars a hundred. Today a man's lucky to sell any of his crop for two dollars a hundred. And so it is with everything else. We've everything to win and nothing to lose."

"Polcher, you're a dangerous man, the most dangerous man on the border. Your

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trade-talk will catch some settlers who are honest at heart but who only think of selling their tobacco. You have other lines of talk to win over the man who refuses to make a move that will divide or weaken the thirteen States.

"Now listen; I know you. I see your hand in the death of Old Thatch. I understand how gladly you'd hear that the Cherokees have gone to water as a nation. I can picture your joy when you hear Creek and Cherokee have taken the red path together. Now this will surely happen: I shall kill you if I can prove you're working to throw the Western settlements into the lap of Spain. I know you're doing it, and, when I can prove it to the satisfaction of a dozen men like Stetson, you'll swing."

"You talk big about killing folks," snarled Polcher. "Any more threats?"

"Only this: you spoke of Piomingo's friendship for Jim Robertson. The minute I hear Piomingo is dead I start out on your trail. And don't figure on your Cherokee blood providing you a hiding-place in that nation. I'd dig you out even if you were hid in the white peace town of Echota. I have spoken."

"Here we are!" called out Stetson. "Light extry torches."

This was speedily done, and, as the three black oaks and the clump of poplars sprang into the light, the men took up their search for the dead Indian. Polcher was most zealous in the task, and Sevier kept close by him. But, although the men scattered and hunted carefully, and although the glare of the torches attracted those men who had been seeking Jackson, no trace of the murdered Creek could be found.

"It's mighty queer," mused Stetson, rubbing his head in perplexity. "If the Injun was killed, he wasn't et up or burned up. But where's the body?"

"If!" snarled Polcher in great disgust. "Didn't you see his scalp?"

"I've seen lots of Injun hair," Stetson quietly replied. "I'm beginning to think that partic'lar hair is older'n even I thought it was. One thing's sartain: there ain't no dead Injun in this neck of the woods."

"Of course the murderer hid the body," cried Polcher, now prepared to play his trump card, and his gaze shifted for a second to the pile of brush, under which, as Thatch had told him, the Indian was concealed.

"Not if he chased Thatch, as the old man claimed," said one of the searchers.

"He had plenty of time while Thatch was hiding in the hollow tree," Polcher returned. "Ah! I wonder if this hides anything!"

And he ran to the pile of brush and cast a triumphant glance at Sevier.

"Now perhaps it does," agreed Sevier. "It's so exposed one wouldn't think to look in it. The murderer probably thought of that."

And he vied with Polcher in tearing the mound to pieces. They came to the forest floor without finding any trace of a corpse.

Polcher bit his lips to hide his rage. He knew that some one had forestalled him; he wondered if it could be Sevier. He began to feel uneasy at Sevier's way of always keeping at his side. Chucky Jack's threat to hang him if he caught him in overt treachery suddenly became very real, and he mechanically felt of his throat.

Sevier would not abandon the quest, however, and insisted:

"We must make sure. Let us all spread out in a wide circle and gradually work in to this spot. Let no hollow tree, pile of rocks or loose brush be overlooked. If an Indian has been killed, a most serious crime has been committed and we may find ourselves at war before we are prepared."

"My woman'll be crazy if I don't git back," growled Stetson. "Job Twill as much as said he didn't know anything about it. Where's Bert Rice and Lon Hester?"

The two names were shouted repeatedly, but neither of the men appeared. Stetson continued:

"They're the only two other witnesses known, and I figger they don't know any more than Twill did. I'm satisfied no Injun's been killed."

"But Old Thatch was killed," cried Polcher, taking a step back. "There's no make believe about that."

"That's another bar'el of cats," grunted Stetson. "I'm going home."

"Yes, Thatch was killed. But if no Indian was slain his story must have been a case of too much liquor," murmured Sevier. "That brings us back to the question; who killed him?"

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POLCHER was alarmed. Not only was his whole scheme tumbling about his ears, but he felt death in the night air and even fancied he detected Sevier examining the dark boughs overhead as if in search of a gallows cross-beam. He cursed his lust for personal vengeance. If he only had accused Thatch of the crime! Or Hester! Where were his wits that he had not utilized the trick for disposing of Hester? Hester was becoming a nuisance, and it was only a question of time when he must be removed. Used as an ignorant tool, the fellow had assumed such airs as to threaten embarrassment to the plans of his Majesty, Charles III.

But more poignant than any regrets was the accumulating fear of the unseen counterplot. He knew Thatch had stumbled upon a dead Indian. And some one had concealed the body. He began to doubt his own perspicacity and to imagine other secret plots were unfolding to hem him in. For the first time in his life he knew what it was to tremble on the edge of a panic. With a sidelong glance he saw Sevier was watching him curiously. With a mighty effort he recovered his self-control and demanded:

"Let no one go back until we've formed the circle as suggested by Sevier. Somewhere near here is the dead body of an Indian. One more effort before we cry quits."

He seized a torch and led the way deep into the forest, calling out for the men to scatter and make the circle complete. The men hesitated, but, as Sevier took up a position within a rod of the tavern-keeper, they grumbled and did as told, even Stetson changing his mind and participating in this, the last effort.

"All ready over here," bellowed Stetson.

The signal was repeated until it had run round the circle, and the men began to slowly advance toward the common center. Ostensibly Sevier searched most carefully, but always with a sidelong glance to see that Polcher's torch was on his immediate right. As the men worked inward they came nearer together, but it was not until they were but a few rods from the three oaks that Sevier gave a low exclamation of anger. The man next to him was not Polcher but one of his tools.

Seizing him by the shoulder Sevier fiercely demanded—

"Where's your master?"

Frightened, the man did not speak for a moment; then he faltered:

"I don't know. He gave me his torch to hold while he looked under some brush."

"Every one scatter and look for Polcher!" roared Chucky Jack. "I charge him with killing Thatch. The job was done with a butcher-knife, like what he carries under his apron. Stetson, take three men and follow me on the jump. You others beat the woods toward the settlement and come to the tavern."

"What's on your mind?" asked Stetson as he raced beside Sevier up the trail.

"I think he'll make for the court-house. To get that scalp!"

"He's lighting out?"

"He'll be hiding among the Cherokees by morning."

Nothing more was said until they reached the court-house. Then, as they entered and by the stub of the candle beheld the horn of ink spilled on the table and inky finger-prints on the worthless petition and top of the table, Sevier quietly announced:

"He's been here and gone."

"And he took the scalp!" cried Stetson.

Sevier smiled and drew it from his hunting-shirt, saying—

"It was too valuable to leave behind."

One of the settlers now thrust his head in at the door and informed:

"Polcher's hoss is gone. The mulatter says he come an' got a pile of money from a hiding-place under the bar. He's lit out jest as ye thought."

Others now came up, and from the doorway Sevier addressed them, saying:

"My friends, it's all over. Polcher's gone, showing that he killed Thatch. There's nothing more you can do except to choose a guard to keep the trash out of the tavern. The men on guard are to find and keep for me all papers in the tavern. The rest of you go home to your families. Stetson, you stay here for a bit."

After the men had departed, Sevier thrust the scalp through a crack in the floor and poked it with the point of his knife until it entirely disappeared. Then to Stetson he directed:

"Send a messenger to Kate, telling her from me that I sha'n't be home until I come. She'll understand. Send other messengers in my name warning the border to be ready to ride to me wherever I may be.

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See that Thatch is decently buried. If young Jackson turns up, tell him he'd better wait here till I get back. He was mixed up in a way he never dreamed of. I sent him to Polcher's. Can't tell you now; no time. But he acted under my orders. They jumped him; I wasn't here, and he took to cover. Tell the boys he's thoroughly innocent. I couldn't tell them tonight without showing Polcher I knew his game. I had to let him have rope; now he's got enough to swing on."

"You're going away, John?"

"I start inside of ten minutes, as soon as I can get my horse. If alive I'll be back when the delegates arrive to settle our new form of government. If I'm not back, you will ask Judge David Campbell to take the lead. Now go, and don't forget the messenger to Kate."

"You're sure—quite sure you can't take me along, John?" begged Stetson.

"Not this time, old friend. I ride far, and I must ride hard, and I must ride alone."

"Then God be with you!"

"May He be with Watauga—with America!" softly added Sevier.

He wrote a few words and handed them to Stetson saying:

"A few lines to Judge Campbell if I'm not here. Now, good night."

Their hands met, and Stetson reluctantly departed.

Sevier caught up his weapons from behind the table and hastened to his horse corraled back of the court-house. As he threw on the saddle he told the intelligent animal:

"Tonpit and Polcher are ahead of us, old boy. We've got to kill Polcher and head Tonpit off. Neither must reach Little Talassee. If we can steal Miss Elsie, then Tonpit's errand is spoiled. McGillivray won't trust him till he has the girl as a hostage."

CHAPTER V

THE ANCIENT LAW

ALL over-mountain men rode well, and their mounts were the envy of both red and white thieves. Among the saddle-bred, however, Chucky Jack was given the palm. Until he reached the French Broad, he spurred along openly, sticking to the trail. The occasional settlers he encountered invariably caught up their arms and made for their horses, only to be told their leader rode alone. After crossing the river the little clearings were more scattered and the approach of the rider brought the gaunt border-men to sharp attention, rifles ready, until he shouted his name.

Once south of the Broad he traversed a land where Death stalked abreast of each passing minute and the husbandman worked with his rifle at his side and the children were taught not to stray from the cabin door. For this was the ragged edge of Western life, where the first threads would be unraveled should the red scourge essay to tear its way to the mountains. On the right of the Great War-Path were scattered the homes of the Holston folks, a tense, grim people waiting for what the next hour might bring them.

Once below the rough parallelogram formed by the Watauga, the Holston and the Nolichucky, the horseman had left the settlements behind him and rode more circumspectly. The site of what was to be Knoxville would not receive its first visit from white men, James White and James Connor, for another three years. A tavern and a court-house marked the beginning of Greeneville. Below this "settled" area were a few "stations," as the blockhouses were called, consisting of the usual stockade inclosing a few small cabins. Invariably these cases of civilization were girt about by the primeval forests.

"Sevier rides alone!" was the word flashed from clearing to clearing on both sides of the Great Trail, and men wondered, and women called the children indoors and stoically awaited the result of the wild gallop.

For Chucky Jack, their idol, was not given to racing into the wilderness unless spurred on by the imperative.

At the Tellico crossing Sevier met a frightened hunter who said he had seen a white man, riding like mad.

"Was there a girl with him?" asked Sevier.

No; he was alone, it seemed.

With a word of thanks Sevier warned:

"Get back to the Broad! This country won't be safe for any honest white man." And with a prick of the spur he was darting away.

At times he avoided small bands of Cherokees, but these were not overwatchful

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as none dreamed of a white man so far within their country. When near the Hiwassee, the borderer drew aside and sought a ford farther to the west of the regular crossing. River-crossings were the favorite haunts of those younger Cherokees who refused to heed the council of pacific elders.

Now, too, each mile of the way brought Sevier that much nearer to the lower towns on the Tennessee, where the motley hordes of white refugees, Shawnee outcasts, Creeks fleeing tribal punishment, as well as turbulent Cherokees, held the towns of Nickajack, Crow Town, Long Island, Lookout Mountain and Running Water. Implacable hatred for the whites was the occasion of these villages, and from them radiated an atmosphere of hostility that no number of peace talks could soften.

It was while seeking a ford that Sevier came upon something that furrowed his brows and caused him to examine his weapons. It was a soiled apron, thrown on a bush. It marked the passing of Polcher, and it openly advertised his identity to any passing savage. Its presence west of the regular ford told Sevier the man was hastening to the lower towns, where the Chickamaugas under Watts and Dragging Canoe would respond promptly to his urging for immediate war.

It revealed the cunning of the man, for, had he paused to win over Old Tassel's people in the eastern villages, he would have lost valuable time and laid himself open to discovery by a pursuing posse of settlers.

"He strikes for headquarters of the war faction," Sevier told himself. "Let him go. They can do nothing without the aid of the Creeks. My path lies south of Lookout Mountain town to the Coosa. All I ask is that I may overtake the Tonpits."

His rapid, stealthy flight, his evasion of all villages minimized his chances of picking up Tonpit's trail. But, knowing the couple were safe in the Cherokee country and convinced they were making for McGillivray's town on the Coosa, he had planned to press forward with all speed to the head of the river below the Chickamauga towns and there endeavor to intercept the two. If luck were with him, he would accomplish this before Polcher had finished his talk with Watts.

Dismounting, he studied the faint trail left by Polcher's horse and decided it was at least twenty-four hours old. This lead was in part represented by the tavern-keeper's hurried flight from Jonesboro and in part by his freedom to ride post-haste by the shortest route regardless of villages. On the whole Sevier was much pleased with his own progress, for he had been compelled to make detours and to dodge roving bands of savages.

He followed the trail to the river and studied the opposite side with care. There was no sign of life except a *huhu*, or yellow mocking-bird. High in the heavens floated the *awahili*, the great sacred bird of the Cherokees, the war-eagle. The superstitious would have found an ill omen in the eagle's course toward the Chickamauga towns.

Its white tail-feathers tipped with black would buy the best horse in any village. It could be killed only after the crops had been gathered and the snakes had denned for Winter, just as the eagle songs must not be sung until the snakes were asleep. But Sevier was not superstitious, and, if he found any symbol in the great bird's majestic flight, it prompted him to picture the expansion of a mighty nation toward the western sun.

Taking his horse by the bridle he waded into the ford and the mocking-bird darted away. He was hoping no Indian had seen the songster's fright when there sounded behind him the *click* of a rifle being cocked. He stopped with the water swirling about his knees and looked back. A glance sufficed to tell him his plight was hopeless did he offer resistance. Fully a dozen warriors were on the bank with rifles aimed.

Turning and leading his horse back to them, Sevier complained—

"When a Cherokee brings a talk to Tsanusdi he is not met with a pointed gun."

One of the warriors met him as he came out of the river and relieved him of his rifle and belt and significantly replied—

"They say that when a Cherokee went to see Little John he left his scalp."

Eyes flashed, and bronzed hands played with knife and ax at the speech. Sevier knew Polcher had begun spreading his poisonous tale and that by this time the story was radiating through the wilderness, village after village catching it up and

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passing it on. Like magic would the news spread throughout the nation.

"By the lips of a Cherokee himself you shall learn that it is a lie. None of your brothers has been harmed in Jonesboro where the Cherokee talks are brought to me," quietly answered Sevier. "Who commands here?"

"We follow John Watts," sullenly replied the warrior.

"Chickamaugas, hopelessly hostile," Sevier inwardly exclaimed. Then aloud, "Where is he? I bring him a talk. I have come fast as the wind to see him."

"He is near. You shall see him," was the grim reply.

"Then do not keep me waiting," was the brusk command. And the borderer leaped on his horse.

The Indians feared him as they had never feared white or red man, and, although he was unarmed and greatly outnumbered, they kept their distance and nervously covered him with their guns as if fearing some magic. The temporary leader of the band went ahead and frequently glanced back to make sure Chucky Jack was not too close to his heels.

Sevier whistled softly, outwardly calm and indifferent. As a fact, he would have preferred that almost any other man than Watts should be ahead of him. He had fought Watts and whipped him, but he respected him for his courage and shrewdness. He considered him the most astute of all the Cherokee leaders, the one chief destined to succeed Old Tassel. Watts was hopelessly belligerent, where Old Tassel sought to gain his ends by trickery and diplomacy.

"Where is Tall Runner?" Sevier sharply called out to the warrior ahead.

"Ask those who laid down the Black Path for his feet to follow to the Twilight Land," was the ominous answer.

"Tall Runner will come to give you the lie," coolly declared Sevier. "He has not gone to the ever-darkening land in the west."

The savages' firm belief in the warrior's demise set the borderer to wondering, however. What if Polcher had overtaken Tall Runner? It might easily have happened that the fleeing horseman had come upon Old Tassel's messenger. And, had it happened, Sevier hadn't the slightest doubt concerning the tavern-keeper's readiness to slay the man and blame his death on Jonesboro. He suddenly decided that his life was most critically in the balance.

"The soul of Tall Runner turns to nothing. It becomes blue," chanted the warrior ahead, his voice taking on the intonation of a *shaman*.

SEVIER held his tongue, knowing his fight must be waged with Chief Watts. In silence the party passed up the bank for a mile and then crossed and struck into a well-beaten path and turned northwest. Another mile and they came to a village. The habitations were substantial log structures surrounding a council-house. Evidently it was a prosperous village, for hogs and fowls wandered about in large numbers, and many horses grazed on the outskirts. Gardens of beans and corn flourished between potato-fields and fields of squash. Along the edge of the clearing stretched peach orchards.

Women engaged in basketry and pottery ceased their labors as Sevier was brought in, then pretended not to have seen him and bowed over their work.

A little girl, carrying a milk-tooth by a string and intent on replacing it by the time-honored custom of invoking *dayi*, the beaver, famous for his strong teeth, came running round a cabin. She shrilly cried out four times, "*Dayi skinta*" ("Beaver, put a new tooth in my jaw") and completed the formula by throwing the tooth on the parental roof. Not seeing Sevier because of her excitement, she bumped into him as he leaped to the ground.

Her terrified squeal was hushed as Chucky Jack caught her up and smiled into her little face. He patted her head and fished out a small trade mirror from his hunting-shirt and pressed it into her hand and earnestly assured:

"The Gnawer will give you a new tooth very soon. Look in this each morning, and some morning you will see it."

With that he set her on her feet. She opened her mouth to bleat in fear but caught a glimpse of her face in the mirror and smiled and decided there was nothing to be afraid of. Neither warrior nor squaw gave any sign of having noticed the little incident, but among the women looks were exchanged as the great borderer was

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conducted to the council-house. And more than one mother whispered in awe—

"Tsan-usdi!"

Ignoring the cane-benches, which were reserved for the head men, Sevier threw himself down on a bearskin and curtly demanded:

"Where is John Watts? Do not keep me waiting."

Fear and respect dominated his captors, and the leader replied:

"He will be here soon. A messenger has gone for him. He rode early this morning and should now be coming back."

"Do not keep me waiting," Sevier repeated.

The warriors withdrew and took up positions about the council-house. As the leader passed out, he reached to one side and caught up something and carried it before him, but not before Sevier recognized it as a large soapstone pipe. His features changed none, yet the warrior's stealthy act in withdrawing the pipe kept alive his sense of danger. The removal of the pipe had two significances: it had been used recently in cementing a peace pact, and it was not to be offered to Sevier.

"The Creeks came here hotfoot on learning the Watauga settlements had been ceded to the central Government and are no longer under Carolina's jurisdiction. Watts has struck a bargain with McGillivray," Sevier quickly deduced.

Half an hour passed with the village remaining very quiet. Then sounded a slight confusion, and the prisoner knew Chief Watts had returned. The low murmur of voices suddenly ceased. The little girl wishing the new tooth shyly thrust her head through the door and invited the stranger to confidences and more gifts. A strong hand gently lifted her away; then Chief Watts, arrayed for hunting but carrying no weapons except the knife in his belt, entered the room, followed by a file of head men.

"I greet you, Little John," he gravely saluted as he seated himself on a bench.

"You have kept me waiting," rebuked Sevier.

Watts' beady eyes flickered a tribute to Sevier's nerve, and with ironical meekness he replied:

"I am sorry. As soon as I knew you were here, I came. What is your business so far inside the Cherokee country?"

"I seek a murderer, a white man. I have no time to waste. Three thousand riflemen will misunderstand my absence and come searching for me if I do not get back to them."

The warriors fidgeted uneasily at this threat. Chief Watts' visage became malignant, and he hissed—

"It would have been better for you if you had brought your riflemen with you."

"It will be much worse for the Cherokee Nation if I do not return," was the prompt reply.

"That is as it will be," rumbled the chief. "I ask you why you or some of your men killed Tall Runner of the Wolf."

"A renegade brought you that lie. You know it is a lie," Sevier calmly retorted.

Watts half rose with hand on knife, then sank back on the bench. Sevier continued—

"The man who told you that is a murderer and the man I am after."

"He killed Tall Runner?" sneered Watts.

"He killed a white man. No one killed Tall Runner. There is peace between the Little Tennessee towns and the Watauga settlements. Tall Runner was a messenger from Old Tassel, who is our friend. Why should we kill him? The Runner brought me talk from Old Tassel about a grand council. I sent a talk back to him, saying I would meet him and all friendly Cherokees in council and settle the trouble about the settlers moving on to the lands south of the French Broad."

"No such talk was brought to me," said Watts.

"That is for Old Tassel to look after. Perhaps he knows you already have made a treaty with the Creeks; that you want war against the whites."

"Why do you say such things?" cried Watts.

"Why do you hide the white peace-pipe when I'm brought here? The pipe you have just smoked with the chiefs sent by McGillivray?"

"It is false. My people do not want war with the whites. They only ask to have back the lands they always held from the beginning of things, the lands the whites have stolen from them."

"It is true you have made a bargain with McGillivray. You are a renegade Cherokee. You lead the Chickamaugas. You have Shawnees in your cabins, bad Indians

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who dare not go home to their Ohio brothers. Beware, John Watts. The Chickamauga towns have been burned once. The fire is kindled that will burn from Crow Town to Running Water."

"Who will lead the Watauga men when they bring that fire?" hoarsely asked the chief, his bronzed chest rising and falling spasmodically as he fought to retain his self-control, to keep his hand off his knife.

"Nolichucky Jack will lead them," was the even response.

"Little John, you are said to have killed a man of the Wolf. Were you many times Chucky Jack you should die," Watts passionately declared.

"If it is proved I killed him, or that he was killed by any of my men, I will shoot myself," Sevier readily promised. "But, if he is alive, you will be sorry you held me here. If he has been killed on Cherokee land by Polcher, the murderer, then I demand that Polcher be handed over to me to be hanged. After he is dead you can have his scalp."

The warriors along the cane-benches stirred and twisted uneasily at these bold words, and more than one began considering the possibility of there being any truth in the intimation that the tavern-keeper was the assassin. Chief Watts was quick to note the disturbing effect of the borderer's speech and loudly proclaimed:

"Our *shamans* have looked into the Great Crystal and have seen you and the Tall Runner facing each other with a bloody knife between you, the point at the Runner's breast. And the Tall Runner has not come."

"No *shaman* has seen me in the Ulunsuti as you tell," Sevier denied, his serene countenance belying his conviction that Watts was determined to remove him from the path of Spain and was prepared to use the *shamans* in order to still any protest from Old Tassel.

WATTS rose and extended his hand, shaking a finger dramatically at Sevier, fiercely demanding—

"You dare to say a Cherokee was not killed and scalped at Jonesboro a few days ago; that you did not hold a council in your council-house and saw the raw scalp placed before you?"

Now Sevier knew for a certainty that Polcher was near and had told his story to the lower towns. Nor did Sevier care to explain that a Creek had been killed, and not a Cherokee; for that news, relayed to McGillivray, would bring even greater evil. He was forced to believe Watts was sincere in considering Tall Runner dead. The messenger's failure to return home was alarming. He found one slim hope to cling to: Tall Runner had started from one of the Little Tennessee towns and had returned there. During his absence Old Tassel had set out on a journey and the Runner had not yet caught up with him.

"After Tall Runner gave me his talk and had received mine and was ready to start back, I told the settlers of Jonesboro I would hang the man who crossed his homeward trail. And they know Chucky Jack keeps his word," Sevier declared.

Watts seemed impressed and remained silent for several moments, his head bowed. Then he rose and with racial dignity said:

"I will send a runner to find Old Tassel to see if anything new has been heard from his messenger. But if the Cherokees should find their red brother had been killed and scalped—just as it is now believed in this village that he dwells where it is ever growing dark—and if Little John should be asked to cover the dead with his blood, who is there to become angry and make war-medicine against us?"

"My riflemen know how and when to make war-medicine."

"Little birds whisper that they can do nothing without a leader; that their minds are in many pieces, some crying for Spain to buy their tobacco, some saying they will make themselves into a new nation and have done with Chucky Jack, who plans to join the Thirteen Fires (thirteen States)."

Sevier folded his arms and stared over the chief's head. Watts continued:

"It can not be that North Carolina will be angry if the spirit of Tsan-usdi travels to the spirit land in the West, for Carolina has driven him from her cabin. The Thirteen Fires will not ask presents for his death, for the Thirteen Fires are made of green wood and give more smoke than flame and will soon die out. The Thirteen Fires are not like fires; they are like an old man without legs to run on, without hands to lift the ax, like an old man who can only open his mouth and make foolish sounds."

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With the quickness of a released steel spring Sevier came to his feet, and, before a savage could guess his purpose, he had Watts' scalp-lock in his left hand and Watts' knife in his right and in a low, vibrant voice was warning:

"I am an American. Say what you will about the Watauga, about Carolina. But, by the white man's God, another black word against the Thirteen Fires and I'll empty your flesh of blood!"

They stood breast to breast, their eyes fighting the old, old battle, with no warrior daring to move for fear of precipitating a tragedy. Nor was there any cowardice in Watts' bearing when he finally broke the tense silence by saying:

"Little John of the Nolichucky is a brave man. The Great Spirit has caused him to be so."

Sevier stepped back and, holding the knife by the tip, extended it, saying:

"My medicine is strong without this. John Watts would be a great man if he did not listen to the evil talks sent him by Alexander McGillivray."

"You would not say these things to McGillivray of the Creeks."

"All, and more. Now I demand to see the man Polcher, who killed a white man."

"You shall see him," quietly promised the chief.

And with a deep bow Watts dropped the knife in his belt and led his warriors from the room.

Sevier knew enough of the Indian character to realize that never had he stood as high in Chief Watts' estimation as now. This knowledge deceived him none as to his danger, however. Even if Polcher should fail to erase this last impression, the chief would persist in believing the future of his race depended on the elimination of all white settlements west of the Alleghanies. To preserve his people he would use whatever tools came at hand, whether furnished by Creek, Spaniard or the Evil One himself.

Now that the over-mountain men were disowned and told to find a guardian in the handicapped central Government, the wily leader realized the Cherokee Nation stood at the threshold of its destiny. Sevier represented the element opposing the red man's ascendency; therefore, he must be removed. No man had ever been more highly esteemed by the Indians as a fighter, and the full measure of praise would be given him even while the sentence of death was being carried out. Sevier had found this recognition of merit to be a characteristic of every Indian tribe with which he had had dealings. Torture and the torments of hell would be accompanied by the sincere acknowledgment of the victim's virtues.

Sevier stepped to a window and noticed the guard on that side had been withdrawn. A similar inspection on the other three sides revealed the same negligence. But the borderer was not to be decoyed into imagining he could escape to the forest by a sudden rush. He knew he was circled about by sharp weapons and sharper eyes and that, should he attempt to escape, he would be despatched off-hand. Such an ending of his captivity would relieve Watts from any censure on the part of Old Tassel and his faction.

Leaning from an open window, Sevier found the invitation to attempt an escape was accented by the absence of even the women and children. The village appeared to be deserted. He smiled grimly at such a transparent ruse. He had fought too many times with the nation, had whipped it too often, to imagine the warriors would neglect any oversight that would insure his captivity. And yet the maneuver made him think more kindly of Watts. The chief fought for the future of his people; he preferred to remove the stumbling-block in the council-house without brutality.

There was something in the drowsy atmosphere of the village that was reminiscent of James Robertson's last visit to his home on the Nolichucky. The fancy was absurd and yet persisted; something that now thrilled him with a promise of succor, and yet too vaguely remembered to take a tangible form in his thoughts. He forced his recollections over the back trail. He recalled the evening. He could see Robertson at the table, talking. Then there flashed across the sensitive screen of his memory the words:

> Then Moses severed three cities on this side Jordan toward the sunrising; that the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbor unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live.

Now he had it through the seeming irrelevancy of some passages of Scripture.

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Robertson had been to Echota, and had spoken of it as a "white," or "peace" town. Sevier had summoned it back to mind through the association of ideas. The Cherokees had degenerated in other matters, but they still held strictly to their ancient law and vouchsafed a refuge to the murderer which was even more liberal than that set forth in Deuteronomy. For, while Moses had stipulated that wilful or premeditated homicide placed the offender outside the pale of sanctuary on the east side of Jordan, the old Cherokee law protected even the wilful slayer once he gained Echota.

Sevier knew a trader, a white man, who had demanded and secured sanctuary at Echota after slaying an Indian in defense of his goods. This man had even been warned by the chiefs that he would be waylaid and killed on his way home unless he first appeased the dead man's relatives with gifts. Sixteen years back Oconostota, speaking for the Cherokee Nation at Johnson Hall on the Mohawk, in the course of making peace with the Iroquois, had said—

"We come from Chotte, where the white house, the house of peace, is erected."

But this was not Echota, and yet the vague promise of help persisted in the borderer's mind. Then there walked through his thoughts the figure of a Frenchman, who had visited him at Jonesboro, having come from the Creek country and passing near the lower towns, and the Frenchman had told of finding rest and security.

"I have it now!" softly exclaimed Sevier, lifting his head and glancing sharply about the village.

The domesticated fowls scratched and pecked before the silent cabins. Pigs grunted and nosed about. Then a small face shyly peeped round the corner of a cabin, and Sevier smiled as he beheld the little maid who had prayed to the beaver for a new tooth. She held up the trade mirror and ventured a few steps toward him. A low admonition from inside the cabin was ignored by the tot. Suddenly making up her mind, she ran to the window and gleefully held up the mirror for him to look in, then gravely opened her mouth and used the glass in seeking the belated gift of *Dayi*.

Sevier chucked her under the chin. A woman came running from the cabin and seized the child by the arm, perhaps fearing that the white man would bewitch her.

"Listen, woman," Sevier commanded under his breath. "Is this Ayuhwasi?"

"Ayuhwasi Egwahi," the woman timidly corrected as she caught up the child and hurried away.

Sevier drew a long breath and turned from the window to conceal his smile. It was the town the French trader had mentioned. And by what a round-about way had the borderer recalled it! A fragment from Deuteronomy, a flash of memory concerning his old friend James Robertson's talk of Echota—and Chucky Jack was now ready to meet Chief Watts, his head men and the villain, Polcher, and dicker for his life.

THE intrusion of the child seemed to be a signal for the deathly quiet to break up. There sounded a hoarse, monotonous chanting of a *shaman*, the shuffling tread of warriors moving with ceremonial step, and then John Watts, followed by Polcher and a string of warriors, entered the council-house, their faces devoid of expression, their eyes resting on the prisoner as if not seeing him. Watts and Polcher took seats side by side, and, had not Sevier been looking for the tavern-keeper, he would not have recognized him.

Polcher now was all Indian. Gone the smirk and urbanity of his white rôle. In discarding the garments of the settlements he had taken on the status of the red man. His features were all Indian, and yet three-fourths of his blood was white. What especially served to disguise him was his elaborate head-dress of eagle feathers. Sevier stared at the feathers intently, then began smiling. As the line of warriors scowled blackly at his show of mirth, he threw off all restraint and laughed aloud.

Before he could be interrogated, he pointed a derisive finger at Polcher and demanded:

"Are the Cherokees mad, or are their medicine-men fools, that they allow an eagle to be killed before the snakes have gone to sleep? Have the Cherokee towns lost all their eagle-killers?"

This unexpected outburst caused the warriors to exchange glances of consternation. The twelve feathers on the breed's head were surely from the tail of the mighty *awahili*, the great war-eagle,

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especially sacred and prominent in all rites pertaining to the war-path.

Watts frowned and said something under his breath. Polcher boldly assured:

"My medicine told me to kill the eagle. It was sick and would have died."

"He has killed the eagle and has taken its feathers without first allowing it to remain four days on the ground!" cried Sevier.

The warriors edged apart from Watts and Polcher, for it was known that the insects on the eagle's feathers will cause a serious skin disease to any who wears them without first leaving them on the ground four days.

Knowing Sevier had thrown him on to the defensive, Polcher declared—

"My medicine protects me from the eagle-sickness."

But Sevier was not yet done with him and roundly scored:

"Does your medicine save the Cherokees' corn? You have killed an eagle out of season. Surely the frost will come and kill the corn."

This, also, was accepted as an incontrovertible fact, and Chief Watts realized the council would be thrown into confusion unless Chucky Jack were headed off. Bringing his two hands together for silence, he cried out:

"That business can wait. Little John need not worry about Cherokee corn. He has asked to see the man who says he killed Tall Runner. The man is here and will speak."

Polcher rose, and a smile twisted his evil face for a moment as he met Sevier's eyes. Then the red man's immobility returned, and he began:

"Tall Runner of the Wolf was killed in Jonesboro. I did not see him killed, but my white friends did. I did see his scalp in the court-house. It was placed on the table before Little John. I tried to get the scalp to bring to you, but Little John destroyed it."

He sat down and indulged in another smile of hate as the line of warriors grunted in unison. Sevier addressed Watts and said:

"This man murdered an old white man. I have followed him here. Will you give him up, or must I come with my riflemen?"

Chief Watts smiled in keen enjoyment at the borderer's boldness. His voice was low and almost gentle as he replied:

"Little John, Little John! Your white law does not reach here. A Cherokee has killed an old white man. What of it? It were better if he had killed a young white man. You ask if you shall come with your riflemen. If you can find them in the ever-darkening land, and your medicine will let you come back, we can not stop you. You have asked to see the man you hunted. He is here. He is one of your judges. Listen now to what this council shall decide.

"Brothers, it is said a Cherokee was killed in or near Jonesboro. What do we find?"

"A Cherokee was killed," came the answer.

"It is said he is Tall Runner of the Wolf. What do we find?"

"Tall Runner was killed."

"It is said a white man killed him. What is the color of the slayer?"

"He is a white man."

The chief paused and cast a glance at Sevier. The borderer knew the climax was about to be sprung but concealed any concern he might have felt by staring at the eagle's feathers and smiling sardonically.

"Brothers, it is said Little John of the Nolichucky killed Tall Runner. What do we find?"

"Tsan-usdi killed Tall Runner."

Chief Watts rose and stared gravely at the prisoner. Polcher leaned forward and grinned in open malevolence.

"There is but one more vote to take, my brothers," slowly said the chief, speaking almost sadly. "What is your answer, brothers?"

"Death to Little John!" chorused the council.

Polcher laughed aloud. The chief scowled at him.

As Watts resumed his seat, Sevier leisurely smoothed out his hunting-shirt, brushed back his brown hair and calmly fixed his blue eyes on the chief. His first words were a question, an unlooked for and astounding query.

"How long since John Watts, leader of the renegade Cherokees who live in the five lower towns on the Tennessee, gives the law in Great Hiwassee? How long since the hostiles, calling themselves

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'Chickamaugas,' can leave their five towns and come here to Ayuhwasi Egwahi—Great Hiwassee—a white town and a peace town, and pronounce the sentence of death?"

Watts started convulsively and bared his teeth in a wolfish snarl. Polcher yelled a white man's curse and grabbed at his belt. Watts seized the breed's hand and flung it down, then became wooden of face. His followers grunted aloud. Polcher passionately cried:

"The white man lies. Echota is the white town. Ayuhwasi Egwahi is a red town and the path to it is red."

"Dog of a mixed-breed!" thundered Sevier, leveling a finger at him. "Your soul shall curl up and become as nothing. Killer of great war-eagle out of season, your bones shall rattle in blackness! You dare deny the law of the Cherokees!"

The one *shaman* present shivered, his eyes glistening with fear, and, unable to witness the blazing scorn the blue eyes were pouring into Polcher, drew his blanket over his head. Watts could not entirely cover up his concern, and, turning to the *shaman*, he asked—

"What does our father say as to the law?"

The *shaman's* figure trembled, for he had great fear of Chief Watts' anger, even though he were a medicine-man. In a quavering voice he informed—

"A long time ago, when all the old things were new, when water-bears lived at the bottom of the Oconaluftee River, this village of Ayuhwasi Egwahi was a white town."

"It has not been used as such in three lives," cried Polcher.

"A man-slayer has never been refused refuge," said Sevier.

Motioning them to be still, Watts fixed his gleaming gaze on the *shaman* and said:

"I have given many bales of black and red cloth to our medicine-men. Now, my father, when was the law changed?"

And he leaned forward and sought to catch the *shaman's* eye. But the medicine-man's fear of physical violence was as nothing compared with his fear of witches, blue and black spirits and dreams that sapped one's soul away.

Keeping his face in the blanket, he answered—

"It can not be changed so long as the town stands."

"*Yul*" cried Sevier in triumph. "And now, John Watts, how dare you come from your renegade towns, from your outcast Shawnees and Creeks, your runaway Cherokees and white dogs, and try to break the law of the Cherokees? How dare you bring this creature, neither white nor red, and let him enter a council and vote for death while he is wearing the feathers of the sacred *awahili?* You say I murdered a Cherokee or had him murdered. I say you and that mongrel dog lie. You say Tall Runner was killed in Jonesboro. I say he lives and goes to find Old Tassel, unless he was killed by that white-Indian after returning to his own people.

"But believe me to be a murderer, or pretend to believe me a murderer. Believe what you will, and still I laugh at you and the man called Polcher. For I appeal to the ancient law of the Cherokees, the law that has never been set aside and can not be set aside so long as a single white town stands on Cherokee soil! I demand my life so long as I stay here in Great Hiwassee. And, by the living God, who is God of both white and red, do you break that ancient law at your peril!"

CHAPTER VI

ON THE WHITE PATH

WATTS glared in speechless rage, then sank back helpless. Polcher slyly drew a pistol, only to find his arm seized by the frightened *shaman* and the weapon twisted from his hand. The warriors gritted their teeth but offered no violence. It was the law. Human blood must never be spilled in a white town. It was also the law among the Creeks and, if old memories were to be trusted, among the Senecas of the Long House. Superstition cowed those who would have scant regard for some other tribal laws.

Sevier was still flushed with victory when Watts drew himself erect and smiled coldly on the borderer and in a mocking voice said:

"So be it. Wo to the Cherokee who breaks the law!" And he paused to dart a warning glance at the enraged tavern-keeper. "But listen, Little John; the law says you shall receive no hurt so long as you stay here. So long as you stay here."

Sevier winced. Time was all precious.

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He must overtake the Tonpits and turn them back. The man's mad ambitions unfitted him for cool-headed scheming, and it might result that his zeal would embarrass the cause of Spain. Yet, such as he was, he was essential in binding McGillivray to the Cherokees and to the white malcontents back in the Watauga country. Could he and the Emperor of the Creeks be kept apart? McGillivray's formidable plans might easily go amiss, or at least be delayed until the border riflemen could prepare for the war.

Sevier appreciated Tonpit's erratic nature and yet did not underestimate him. He came from a proud family. He was austere in personality but could surely gather a following among the recent arrivals over the mountains. Old-timers would stick by Sevier and blindly follow his lead. Many of the newcomers and the lawless element—the last as a unit—would huzza for Tonpit. The Indians only asked for two hostile factions among the settlers. Aided by the Creeks, they would side with Tonpit.

So Sevier had reason for dismay as he considered the trap he was in. Just so long as he remained within the limits of the town, all trails would be white and he would be treated courteously. Not even Polcher, now he had been taught his lesson, would raise a hand against him. But let him step over the line, and he became legitimate game for any ax.

Chief Watts gaged his thoughts correctly and motioned for Polcher to withdraw. After the tavern-keeper had departed, the chief with mock gravity said—

"My new brother, who has come to live with us, understands where he can walk and where he must not walk?"

"He understands," was the cheerful reply. "As he is weary, he will be glad to rest here until the next Green Corn Dance wipes out the crime he never committed."

"When new fire is given to take the place of the old, he will be free to go unharmed," admitted Watts, well satisfied to hold Sevier a prisoner until the corn was ready for harvesting, or about the middle of August. Watts believed the die would be cast inside of thirty days and that, without Sevier to stiffen their morale, the settlers would be conquered.

Watts was the last of the warriors to leave. At the door he called out a command, and a man handed him in Sevier's rifle and a belt. Presenting these to the borderer, the chief gravely said:

"These are yours. No one shall say the Cherokees are thieves even if the whites have stolen their land."

"I shall feel easier for having them so long as Polcher is in the village."

"You need have no fear of Polcher. He will not think of harming a hair of your head. He showed anger while here, but that is because he has lived long among whites and forgets the law. Now he knows; he will not reach for his knife again—in Great Hiwasse."

"If I choose to try to escape, can I have my horse?"

"Your horse is at the edge of the village with the others. Take him any time. It is your horse. If you care to take the risk, you shall set out in as good condition as you were in when my young men brought you here."

"I will remember it in your favor when next I have you under my rifle," said Sevier, his eyes sparkling as he examined his rifle and pistol and found they had not been tampered with. "You stay here?"

"I have work to do in my lower towns," was the enigmatic reply, illuminated somewhat by the peculiar smile accompanying the words.

"Preparing for war while I wait for the corn to be harvested. On coming here I saw a war-eagle flying away. What was it a sign of? Your defeat?"

Watts looked sober. More progressive in his ideas than the bulk of his people, yet he could not discard many of the superstitions. Secretly he was alarmed that Polcher had killed an eagle out of season, yet that was a fault that did not necessarily spell disaster. To make light of the disquieting suggestion he indifferently said:

"We have *shamans* to read signs. It is enough for you to know that all crimes die out and are forgotten when old fires die and are replaced by the new. You have your choice, Little John. Stay and live, or step over the line and have an ax stuck in your head. *Kul*"

"I have heard you," was the quiet reply.

Free to come and go, Sevier quit the council-house and wandered about the village. Feeling hungry, he entered a cabin and found the little girl playing with the mirror. He was promptly provided with beans and venison. The father of the

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child eyed him stealthily. The child boldly ran to him and climbed on his knee. Sevier knew these were his friends insofar as they could be such without betraying their people.

"Has a white man and a white woman passed through this village since the little one lost her tooth?" he asked as he ate.

The man turned away, but the woman shook her head, and Chucky Jack knew she answered truthfully. He was disappointed, yet remembered it was very possible he had passed ahead of them. Tonpit would be held back by the girl. It was also possible they had passed the village without entering it. And he persisted—

"Have you heard of a white man and woman traveling to the Coosa?"

Again the man pretended not to have heard the query, and once more the woman silently answered in the negative. He was puzzled. He knew the Tonpits could pass without hindrance once it was known they were bound for McGillivray's town. And, did they pass, the news would be flashed from village to village with incredible swiftness.

"It must be that I've got ahead of them; that Polcher got far ahead of them," he decided as he finished his meal. "Tonpit would have to stop and give the girl a chance to rest. Even at that it's queer no word is brought ahead of their coming."

He went outside, wondering if by any chance Tonpit had changed his plans and struck for Governor Miro's headquarters at Pensacola. The girl's hurried scrawl told her lover they were bound for Little Talassee. This substantiated his theory that McGillivray had demanded her as a hostage to bind Tonpit to his bargain. This line of conjecture brought Kirk Jackson to mind, and he speculated on the young man's whereabouts. How long would he hide from the settlers, thinking a mob was after him to give him short shift?

"Just long enough to feel sure he could find me in the court-house," was the borderer's decision on this point. "On learning I've gone and that he's safe in the settlement, he'll wait just long enough to get a horse and come pounding after the girl. Wish I'd left a note for him to stay there, although that would have no effect on a young man in love."

REALIZING the folly of further speculation, he brought his mind to bear on his immediate surroundings and strolled out to see his horse. The faithful animal ran to him to be petted. To leap on his back and speed down the trail would take but a minute. He had his arms and had eaten. While making much of the horse, he cast his glance about. The woods were quiet, scarcely a breath stirring the foliage. The itching to be off almost tempted him, then he turned away and walked but a few rods toward the cabins when Watts came from behind a bush.

"No, John," he said before the other could speak; "I decided not to risk it. For a bit I believed it could be done; then I saw *tsiskwaya*, the little sparrow, fly upward, afraid of something on the ground."

"*Tsiskwaya* saw a snake," suggested Watts.

"He wore Cherokee paint," smiled Sevier.

The chief lowered at him evilly, a heavy scowl distorting his dark face. The borderer knew something had gone wrong with his enemy and philosophically decided he ought to be benefited by whatever had displeased the chief.

"My brother is angry because I did not ride down the trail," he said.

Watts snarled like a tree-cat, then forced his face to composure and said:

"I am angry at your narrow escape. If you had gone down the trail, the snake might have bitten you. Who knows? Bad dreams would have come to me if you had been harmed."

"Just what does that mean?" Sevier suspiciously asked.

Watts pointed to the end of the village, where warriors were filing in between the first cabins.

"Old Tassel comes, and with him is the Tall Runner, the man of the Wolf, who Polcher said was dead."

Sevier could scarcely credit his eyes. Old Tassel and Tall Runner rode ahead of the band.

"Then I am free to go. I do not need to wait for the Green Corn Dance to wipe out all sins," he cried.

"Little John is as free as the birds of the air," quickly assured Watts. "His horse is waiting. He has his rifle, pistol and ax. He had better go before Old Tassel asks him to stay. If there is a snake in the woods, I will drive him away." And he

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raised two fingers to his lips and whistled shrilly. The signal was promptly answered. "The path is open and smooth," he said to Sevier.

There was a strong possibility that Old Tassel would insist on his remaining in the village. Sevier had learned, however, that he invariably profited by doing the opposite to what hostiles like Watts wished him to do. Now that luck had permitted him to meet Old Tassel, whose pacific inclinations were a thorn in the side of the war-faction, he instantly became determined to win some advantage from the encounter.

"Where is the man Polcher?" he asked.

"He is here somewhere."

"I think my medicine is telling me to see Old Tassel before I go," he announced. With that he hastened forward, followed by the chief, and overtook Old Tassel in front of the council-house.

The old chief was not prepared for the meeting, and his alarmed manner of glancing about suggested an expectation of beholding a band of Chucky Jack's famous riflemen. His show of perturbation impelled Sevier to wonder what tricks the wily old diplomat was up to. The Tall Runner ignored Sevier's presence entirely.

"My brother did not think to see me here," greeted Sevier, grasping the chief by the hand.

"My brother is far from home," mumbled the chief.

"Not when he is in the home of his friends," corrected Sevier. "Come, let us open a bag of talk. I sent you a talk by Tall Runner to say I would meet you in council. I am here alone to do so."

Old Tassel stared in amazement at his audacity. The warriors behind the old man exchanged puzzled glances and tightened their grip on their axes. Sevier noted the hostile demonstration and read the red minds easily. Never before had they been given such an opportunity. Many times Chucky Jack and his mounted riflemen had struck them and wounded them sorely. Now he was in their midst, far from the settlements and seemingly alone. The last fact they could scarcely believe.

As their gaze turned to suspiciously sweep the forest, John Watts spoke up, assuring:

"Little John rides alone. My young men found him and brought him here."

"To this white town of peace," added Sevier. "What could be better than to hold our talk in a peace town, where evil thoughts and bloodshed are not known?"

Old Tassel's braves glanced at Watts, as if asking if that were the reason the borderer was still alive, and found their answer in his gloomy eyes. Old Tassel shook off his confusion and assented:

"We will hear my brother's talk. The Cherokees do not want war with the whites. My brother would be safe in a peace town or a red town, as safe as he would be on the Holston or the French Broad."

The sullen countenances of his followers and the half-masked ferocity of Watts left room for doubt as to the unanimity of this sentiment, but no word was spoken as the two chiefs and representative men filed into the council-house and took their places.

After a decorous pause Sevier rose and said:

"Evil birds have whispered to the Cherokees, and the nation now refuses to keep the chain of friendship from dragging on the ground. It lies in the dirt, no matter how high my people lift their arms. It is the end in the Cherokee country that is allowed to drag. This should not be. White men and women and children going to Kentucky have been killed by the Cherokees. This must not be.

"The Cherokees have killed many white settlers who have crossed the Holston and the French Broad. Their bones have not been covered. Our settlers were told by North Carolina they were right in going there. It is too late to call them back. They will hold the land because the bones of their dead have not been covered.

"We hear that the Cherokees now plan to join hands with Alexander McGillivray and his Creeks; that war-talks have been sent back and forth between the two nations. Let the Cherokees beware how they take a red ax from the Creeks.

"Where did the Creeks get their lands? From those they struck in the head. Who filled the Creek cabins with guns and powder? A Spanish King over the big water. How does Spain treat the Indians? Go and ask the old men among your people, among the Creeks and the Seminoles, who have received the stories from the old men behind them. Ask the old men of this nation what their fathers' fathers told them of De Soto.

"If the Cherokees take the red ax from

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the Creeks and should break off all the heads of the settlers along the French Broad, the Holston, the Nolichucky and the Watauga, what would they gain? The Creeks as friends. They have never been a true friend to any neighbor. Spain a friend? When you bait a sacred war-eagle with the carcass of a deer and kill it, you pray to it not to take vengeance on you, saying it is no Cherokee that killed it, but Askwani—a Spaniard. Why do you pray to turn the dead eagle's vengeance against the Spaniards? Because it is burned into your heads from the old, old times how cruelly Spain used your people.

"*Hayu!* If you do not sound the red war-whoop, the Creeks can do nothing. They can not harm you. If you join with them Spain will see they get your lands. Then Spain will take all the land for herself. If you hold up the chain of friendship so it does not drag on the ground, I will promise you that our settlers shall not go beyond the boundary we agree upon at the grand council.

"The land now held south of the Broad and the Holston must remain ours to cover the dead you have slain. We will cover your dead with presents and will not wander from our land to your land. If you make this treaty and stand to it, I promise I will lead my riflemen against the Creeks should they try to steal any of your lands. I have spoken."

THE boldness of this talk amazed the warriors. At the least they had expected Sevier to be very conciliatory. His blunt reminder of what the Kentucky settlers had suffered, his firm insistence that the settlers below the French Broad would not vacate the land and his calm offer of assistance left them speechless. His magnificent assurance, although isolated from his friends by many miles of enemies, touched their imagination and commanded their deepest respect. Even Watts, although determined to take the red path, could not suppress his admiration. The effect on Old Tassel was very marked.

Sevier believed that Watts' eagerness to have him leave the village without meeting the old chief was due to some half-promise on Tassel's part to favorably consider the Creeks' request for an alliance in a general war against the whites. If Old Tassel had intimated any such willingness, it was now obvious that Sevier's plain speaking was impelling him to reconsider and weigh the consequences most carefully.

Watts fumed with impatience to denounce Sevier and his riflemen and to urge his hearers to declare war at once, but etiquette demanded that Old Tassel speak first. The old chief did not relish his task and faltered and hesitated but managed to say:

"My brother's words have entered my ears. North Carolina has sent me many talks, promising I should have justice and that all new people be moved off my land. I am an old man. The promises must be kept very soon, or I shall not live to see them kept. Now they tell me the Watauga settlements are not a part of North Carolina and that I must send my talk to the Thirteen Fires, to the Great Council of America. So much going about to get justice troubles me."

Sevier quickly replied:

"I will keep the promises I make in the grand council I am asking you to come to. The Watauga settlements are to become a separate fire and blaze beside the thirteen."

Unable to restrain his fierce passions longer, Watts leaped to his feet and cried:

"Why should we wait longer to have promises kept? Why should we believe new promises will be remembered better than the old? What power has Little John to make the settlers keep off our lands? Even now the settlements do not know where they belong. North Carolina does not want them. The Great Council of America has not taken them in. Who, then, is to see that the promises are kept?

"*Ku!* Spain tells these settlers they must not travel on the Mississippi, and the river is closed except to the friends of Spain. Little John is a brave man, but he can not shoot his rifle across the big water. Spain speaks, and her voice comes across the water, and she is obeyed. Let us go to no grand council until the whites have left our lands." Then whirling on Sevier he cried, "I have said you are a brave man. I meant the days when we fought each other on the border. I do not mean now—today. For you have sneaked through the woods and kept from sight until safe in a peace town. You would talk soft if you were in Little Talassee, face to face with McGillivray."

Sevier knew Watts was trying to drive him into the wilderness where the paths

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were red, and he accepted the challenge by retorting:

"I will go to Little Talassee. I will speak face to face with McGillivray, and, after I have finished, go and ask him if I spoke soft." Turning to Old Tassel he demanded, "What do you say to my talk? Will you come to a grand council on the French Broad or on the Holston after I have returned from McGillivray's town?"

Old Tassel, beset by his desire for peace, yet feeling the surge of his warriors' will for fighting, now found a loop-hole. He gravely replied—

"When you come back from carrying your talk to McGillivray, I will go to a grand council on the French Broad."

"You have given your promise in the council-house of a peace town. It is to be so," said Sevier, picking up his rifle and preparing to go.

Watts stepped forward and extended his hand, and, as Sevier grasped it and searched his face, he said:

"Little John is still a brave man. Whether it be peace or war, you are a brave man. And will you go to little Talassee?"

Sevier dropped his hand and coldly replied—

"Unless stopped by a Chickamauga bullet, I shall go there."

Watts clicked his strong teeth and whispered:

"McGillivray will keep you safe there. You will not get in his trail again." Then turning to the curious warriors he cried out, "Ho! A brave man goes to Little Talassee. You will not harm him. But, if you see a white man turning back before reaching McGillivray's town, you may know he is a coward and treat him as such."

Ignoring the hostile glances, Sevier glided from the council-house and made for his horse. He now had his chance to go to McGillivray on the Coosa, and a fringe of Cherokee warriors would see to it that he did not turn back alive.

Hurrying to the corral, he saddled his horse and mounted and confided:

"Well, old fellow, that's where I reckon to go, to Little Talassee. But I'd rather go alone instead of being chased there. Coming back will be harder."

As he rode down the white path, he kept his eyes opened for signs of Polcher. He did not anticipate any attack from the tavern-keeper until he left the vicinity of the village, for Watts must have warned that no blood was to be shed so long as the path was white. When he struck into the main trail leading southwest, then he would be traversing a red way, and there would be no ancient law holding Polcher back. However, that was a detail to be attended to when encountered. What worried him considerably was not the tavern-keeper, sure to be in ambush somewhere ahead, but Kirk Jackson and the Tonpits.

He had barely cleared the outskirts of the village when he discovered some one was following him. He reined in, expecting to behold the van of the Cherokees coming to make sure he did not double back to the north. But there was but one man, and he ran with no efforts at concealment. To the contrary he now began calling Sevier by his Cherokee name, "Tsan-usdi."

"I am here," called out Sevier.

As the Cherokee burst into view, the borderer recognized him as the father of the little girl who prayed to the beaver.

"You want me?" Sevier asked.

"I go with you. Old Tassel has spoken it."

"How far do you go with me?"

"Until we reach the land of the Creeks."

"To see that I do not turn back," sneered Sevier.

"To see no Bad Indians cross your path," was the grave correction.

Sevier's hostility vanished. Old Tassel feared his promise of safe passage might be violated by some of the younger men and wished to shift all responsibility of the borderer's fate on to the Creeks. Still half a measure of solicitude was decent of him, and Sevier knew he had him won from thoughts of war for the time being at least.

"You are?"

"The Jumper, of the Ani-Kawi."

"A man of the Deer clan should know the trails. We will go on, Little Brother. Tell me when the white path turns red."

"I will tell you," grunted the Indian.

"Tell me where is the man called Polcher?"

"In the forest. Somewhere along the red path."

Trotting ahead, the Jumper led the way for several miles, and yet Sevier could detect no signs of Cherokees in the rear. He said as much to the Jumper, who drew a half-circle in the air behind him, saying:

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"They are from there to there. We shall not see them so long as we go toward the Coosa."

"It is well," said Sevier.

The Jumper raised a hand and then threw himself prostrate with his ear to the ground. Sevier quieted his restless horse and listened. He heard nothing. The Indian rose and informed:

"Men come. We must leave the trail."

"Why should we hide, Little Brother? What is there to fear along the white path that leads to the white town?"

"Nothing to fear from men of my color," said the Jumper with a touch of irony. "But I can not answer for the whites."

"White men!" exclaimed Sevier, dismounting and leading his horse aside and into cover.

His first thoughts were of Tonpit, the man who, despite his weakness and ambitions, was so necessary to Spain and Charles III's field representative, Alexander McGillivray.

"They bring horses to trade in Great Hiwassee," the Indian added.

Sevier's hopes fell, then rebounded as he discredited the Indian's ability to know who was coming and their purpose. Thus far he had been able to detect nothing but the usual forest sounds.

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"Some of the horses have no riders."

SKEPTICAL, Sevier composed himself to wait in patience. After what seemed a long time, there came a burst of voices and the trampling of hoofs, and above the confusion roared a coarse voice hurling curses at animals and men.

"Hajason!" muttered the Jumper, his face scowling.

"Red Hajason!" softly cried Sevier, mechanically shifting his rifle.

The Jumper touched his hand as it lay on the gun, and he warned:

"You must not think of that. You are still in the white path."

Sevier lowered the rifle and asked—

"Does he trade at Hiwassee?"

The Indian nodded. Had not Sevier's errand concerned the fate of the Western settlements, he would have considered his journey well worth the danger just for an opportunity to confront and kill this man whose name was anathema from the Watauga to the French Broad and throughout the Carolinas east of the mountains.

Wherever horses were stolen and hurried to hidden forest depots, the name of Red Hajason was known and detested. That he continued to carry on his thievery was due to his practise of sending agents to do the actual work while he remained in his stronghold somewhere at the headwaters of the Hiwassee River in the southwestern corner of North Carolina. When not at this camp, it was said he made his home over the line in South Carolina, "that delight of buccaneers and pyrates," as the Rev. Hugh Jones, chaplain to the honorable Assembly of Virginia, characterized that commonwealth in 1750.

Border-folks, however, denied that Red Hajason was compelled to shuttle back and forth between the Hiwassee and the Tugalo Rivers and openly charged he had been seen in the capital of North Carolina, seemingly on excellent terms with some of those who pretended to safeguard the destiny of the State. This would not be surprizing, as in formative periods the devil takes advantage of chaos to walk close to saints.

But the over-mountain country was closed ground to the king of horse-thieves; there was no doubting that fact. A bullet on sight was what he would receive did he venture forth where he sent his men. Thus it had happened that Sevier, while having had the pleasure of hanging several of Red Hajason's tools, had never looked on his face.

The Jumper increased his vigilance and cunningly took Sevier's horse by the nose to prevent a whinney.

"We must go deeper into the woods," he urged.

"Listen, Little Brother, I must see this Red Hajason," whispered Sevier, dismounting. "Take the horse back. I will stay here."

"This path is white," frantically protested the Indian, anticipating from Sevier's frowning visage a bloody settlement with the outlaw.

"My eyes can not shed blood," soothed Sevier. "He shall pass unharmed—this time. But I must see him."

The Jumper reluctantly led the horse deeper into the cover, and Sevier hid himself and waited. The Cherokees owned many horses, excellent animals. A brisk

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trade was carried on between the friendly Indians and the settlers. And there was much trading between Cherokee and Creek, only it was the white man's horse that sometimes went to the Southern nation. And Hajason traded stolen nags for honest ones and through unsuspected agents sold the latter to the whites.

Hajason was not dubbed "Red" because of rufescent hair or complexion. He was Red because of his deeds, his readiness to spill the blood of the weaker. Only affairs of great importance had restrained Sevier from taking a posse of his swift-riding riflemen and running down the scourge long before this.

The cavalcade now drew near, and he could easily make out the oaths and commands being shouted in English by Hajason, sprinkled with orders in the Cherokee tongue. Now they burst into view, two half-breeds riding ahead, a dozen horses following them. Bringing up the rear were three white men. Sevier had eyes for only one of the trio, a giant of a man, whose features were an amazing mass of brutality and evil passions, whose bearded lips opened seldom except to permit the escape of a blasphemy.

His companions cowered under his tongue-lashings, while his thunderous epithets hurled at the head of the drove kept the breeds jumping convulsively. He passed within a dozen feet of Sevier, and the borderer had ample opportunity to study him in detail and time to regret that his hands were tied by the ancient law. With his pistol he could have obliterated a great evil, and he was powerless to act.

So intent was he on scanning the outlaw's burly body and repulsive face that he all but overlooked the horse he was riding. The moment he noticed the big black his interest in Red Hajason became a minor matter. There was no mistaking the animal. Not another horse on the border that showed those white knees, for all the world like two bandages. The horse was Tonpit's favorite mount. Staring incredulously, Sevier darted his gaze over the rest of the animals and found the small bay Miss Elsie always rode.

"By all the red gods in the East, he's got the major's and the girl's nags!" gasped the borderer, craning his neck and risking discovery to watch the cavalcade move up the trail.

Tonpit and his daughter had disappeared from home the night of Old Thatch's death. Their departure was, presumably, the result of the Creek's message from McGillivray. Lon Hester had disappeared the same night.

"They were bound for Little Talassee," he mused. "They rode in haste, or I should have overtaken them. And yet the girl had to have time to rest. Polcher and Hester are free to come and go among the Cherokees. I know Polcher is ahead, waiting for me. Hester is just the man to dicker with Hajason for fresh animals for the major and the girl. But their horses appeared to be fresh. Why change them?"

He stared longingly up the trail, fighting down his impulse to pursue Red Hajason and kill him, if need be, to get the truth. To shed blood would be a violation of the law he had invoked to save his own life. He heard Hajason shouting a boisterous greeting in the Cherokee tongue and knew he had glimpsed some of the warriors advancing on either side of the trail. To go after the outlaw and scare the truth from him would mean an encounter with the Indians, who had been ordered to treat him as a coward did they catch him turning back. They would not slay him on the white path, but they surely would make him a prisoner.

He almost wished he had delayed his departure until Hajason had arrived. And yet, had Fate worked that way, new complications would have arisen and the trail to the south might not have been open to him. Next rose the puzzling point: why should Hajason come in person to superintend the sale or exchange of a dozen horses? The outlaw was a villain of large activities. He was well known and hospitably received in Great Hiwassee. His immunity to danger consisted in leaving details to his subordinates.

"No!" growled Sevier. "He never came just to get rid of the horses. He has had many deals with this town. He could have sent a boy and a talk and made the trade. He came for a purpose. The nags happened to be on hand, and he fetched them."

The Jumper pressed through the bushes behind him and touched his shoulder and anxiously insisted:

"Little John loses much time. The medicine of the Deer tells me Death creeps down the trail, even though it be a white trail."

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And he nervously fumbled a small bag hanging round his neck and rolled his eyes in alarm toward the village.

"I am ready," Sevier said, springing into the saddle. "Death ever lurks where Red Hajason is."

"Chief Watts' Chickamaugas are very close," warned the Jumper.

"Let them come," was the careless reply. "We have not turned back, not so much as a foot." And, shaking the reins, he rode down the trail with his guide at his stirrup.

TO BE CONCLUDED

TO A FRYING-PAN

BY ZOE A. TILGHMAN

STEEL-STANCH comrade of my wanderings, strange
Magician, alchemist, that so couldst change
Untempting viands to ambrosial fare,
Fit for the gods themselves, had they been there—
Better to me thy unpretentious "eats"
Than chef's most costly gastronomic feats.
Grimy and black, thou still to me art dear,
Nor sweeter music ever charmed my ear
Than thy resounding clangor when my pard
With his knife-handle smiting thee full hard
Beat the tattoo that summoned me to chuck.
In days auspicious, or in hardest luck,
Through desert sand and heat, through mountain snows—
Through all, the memory of thy service glows.
Be with me till I cross the Great Divide,
Shall I not miss thee on the other side?
Blest comforter of my faint inner man,
Thou, tried by fire—my faithful frying-pan.

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THE SAYINGS OF HELL-FIRE SMITH DONE INTO POLITE ENGLISH

BY TALBOT MUNDY

YEARS ago Talbot Mundy sent us "Some of the Sayings of Hell-Fire Smith, Done into Polite English." Tremendously interesting and embodying much worldly wisdom, but a wisdom so soaked in cynicism, selfishness, inhumanity and criminal instinct that we hesitated about giving it wider circulation. But I think the hesitation was a mistaken one, for after all the big point is that all his cynical brutality didn't get him anywhere—except into hell, a destination one can reach without the aid of wisdom, mistaken or otherwise.

Only a fool would take him as an example, but as a study in human—or inhuman—nature he is most interesting. Also, there are plenty of him yet in the world and it may be helpful to more decent men to have a general survey of his dangerous psychology. He's not the kind of animal to trust.

Here is Mr. Mundy's letter, written some five, six or seven years ago:

Enclosed are some sayings of Hell-Fire Smith which you may be able to use. Smith died more than two years ago, so there is no chance of his suing you for libel—as I certainly would if you printed his epigrams as mine!

He had been in jail once or twice, and he had one wife in the United States and another in Canada. I know that because I used to write his letters for him. They both wrote to him from time to time, claiming support, but he got out of it because one of them had a daughter. He told her that her daughter could support her and that therefore she needed no help from him; he told the other one, of course, that she had only herself to support—it would have been different had she had any one dependent on her—a daughter for instance!

His ghost will surely glory in the notion of publicity, for, like most blackguards of the fearless type, he was given to bragging on occasion.—TALBOT MUNDY.

AND here are the "sayings" themselves—a very pitiful philosophy of life. Among them are bits of sound, practical advice, free from cynicism or evil, but as a whole they are merely a look-in at a blackguard's soul.

Some of the Sayings of Hell-Fire Smith
Done Into Polite English
BY TALBOT MUNDY

HELL-FIRE SMITH was originally an American citizen, once a sheriff somewhere in Montana; he left the United States in a hurry, his departure having something to do with a question of graft. The next that was heard of him he was a trooper in the North-west Mounted Police, and he was in a hurry again when he left that force and Canada.

AFTER that he went through the Matabele and Basuto campaigns in South Africa, winning golden opinions for his bravery and soldierly qualities, and when the Boer War broke out he gained enviable distinction as the brilliant leader of a special corps of scouts. But when the war was over he got into trouble with the Government in the matter of some mules; there were a thousand of them in his possession, but they were all branded with the British Government broad arrow, and he could give no satisfactory explanation for it. The Government could never explain, either, how he managed to give the police the slip; but he did it, and his next and last scene of operation was East Africa, where he died of blackwater fever after making for himself a reputation as the mightiest hunter that had ever lived off the country.

HE ALWAYS claimed that he had "taken out his first papers in ——" and that "the devil had promised him a district leadership" when he got there; so no doubt he is still happy. He had a suitable maxim ready for every conceivable occasion, and though most of them are quite unprintable owing to their exotic nature and the crisp language in which they were couched, there are a few among them that are worthy of reproduction—after being treated with disinfectant and put through a strainer.

WHEN he was drunk he would reel them off one after the other; but when he was sober, which was his usual condition, he always used them very aptly, and their phraseology hardly ever varied. Here follow twenty-five of them:

There's one point that policemen and parsons have in common—I hate 'em.

Remember—A lion's more scared than you are nine times out of ten; soak him quick enough and hard enough and he'll quit. The tenth time he'll get you.

Judge a man by the way he eats on the morning after; a man who can't eat don't agree with good liquor; walk wide of that kind.

Never talk fight unless you mean fight; then fight and don't talk.

A man who can hold his tongue could murder the Pope of Rome and get away with it. It's strange

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though, how men will talk, for it's the one thing you can't make 'em do if they don't want to.

Don't sleep with a gun under your pillow; that's a mug's game. Lie on it; then you'll know where it is when you wake.

Water that sparkles and looks pretty is no good; boil it and then put whisky in it. You'll spoil the whisky, but the mixture 'll be good to wash your feet in.

Never camp on the near side of a river, nor make friends with the man who does it. That kind of man's no good.

Get drunk by all means if you want to, but take care the other man gets drunk first.

A dago keeps his knife in his right boot, so watch him when he stoops. If he's got a gun, walk behind him—with your finger on the trigger.

Revolvers are no good anyhow. A rifle's a whole lot better, but the best thing of all's a shotgun. Still, a good thick stick and a trick of smiling at the right minute will take a man through 'most anything.

Shoot to kill every time, but never shoot until you've got to.

When you're feeling scared, lie down; that's the safest position there is, and it'll bring your nerve back.

Lend a pal your money, or your clothes, or your reputation; the most he can do is to spend the one and spoil the other. But don't lend him your gun, for you may need it to use on him.

Here's the first rule of fighting; with Dutchmen, Dagoes, and Darkies hit first every time; with a white man look nasty and wait for him to begin.

On the head is the best place to hit a nigger, because you can't break it; the next best place is on the shins, because that hurts most. Never hit him on the body unless you want to kill him.

In dealing with bad niggers, pick out the one that's making most noise and hit him on the head with a pick-handle. He'll convert the rest.

The best way to keep a nigger is to keep his wages. If you pay him he'll quit, but if you don't he'll follow you through —— to get 'em.

Never let a nigger know you're broke. If he gets suspicious, pay him and then play cards with him. Use a cold deck.

Give a nigger a khaki suit and a gun and he'll take a letter where the devil couldn't follow him, and bring back the answer.

A nigger ain't happy unless you whack him now and then; he thinks you don't take an interest in him. The trick, of course, is to keep him happy.

If you can't find water, catch a nigger; then tie his hands behind him and fill his mouth with salt. He'll lead you right to it.

When a woman gets affectionate, stand her off; she's scheming.

To —— with women anyhow. If you must have truck with 'em, love and run away. But run quick.

There's safety in numbers, so never love one woman at a time; if you do, she'll treat you like she treats the cat; she'll keep you hanging round all day, and chase you out o' door when night comes. The sex is no good.

Tell the truth to your pal, but always lie to a woman, on principle.

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

HERE is something to be added to the cowboy saddle, described and illustrated by Angus MacManus at our first June Camp-Fire:

Have read friend MacManus's letter in regard to throw-ropes, saddles, etc., and I think he has the right dope. (As I have spent about seven years on the range.) But there is one important item he has not mentioned, neither have I heard of any authors mentioning it in their western stories, and that is the Cinch Buckle or "Hurry up Buckle," as we call it out West.

The latigoe is run from the cinch-ring to the first step of the buckle, then back through the cinch and through the second step of the buckle and is buckled there according to the horse's girth. The top of buckle is merely slipped through the short latigoe-ring. After a cinch buckle is adjusted to a horse he can be saddled or unsaddled in a few seconds by merely drawing up the cinch with one hand and with the other hand slip the top of the buckle through the short latigoe-ring. In unsaddling just draw up the cinch again and slip the buckle out.

The above is used by most riders in the West and I would not be without it.

In regard to a throw-rope I have found a 35-foot length, three strand hard manila 7-16 of an inch to be of the best use.—IRVING BLANK.

THE following from our old comrade Alex. McLaren refers to an inquiry as to what are the real conditions along the Border—are they wild or tame?

Ruby, Ariz.
March 10, 1919.

Well the "long connected guy" is buttin' in again. This time due to a squib in "Camp-Fire" about border conditions. I can throw some light on that small portion of it that is "staked off" by international monuments 130, 131, 132, 133, same being about three miles or so apart (approx in my mind).

FOR the last three years or so things have been somewhat disturbed among cowmen on both sides of the line. The "*Caranzistas soldados*" seem to favor eating gringo beef in preference to the much easier obtained Mex. variety and often cut wires and chase it over from U. S. side. This has been the cause of our otherwise docile cowboys strapping on six-guns and making walking, or rather I should say riding, arsenals out of themselves. Numerous little scraps have been pulled off, but with no very serious effect.

Bad men? Well I don't know how to answer that. We have none of the dime-novel variety, who parade with bowie-knives in their teeth and a multiplicity of firearms adorning their persons, yet this is no different than any other border district where human temperment is a factor. We have men who would not hesitate to act should the occasion arise that demanded "smokin' things up with the trigger-finger."

OF LATE, during the last few weeks, the most excitement has been by the Mex. troops "ginning" the Yaquis around and latter taking refuge on this side. Only last week right along the boundary line there were a bunch of sixty-odd Yaqui bucks and some ninety Mex. soldiers. The Yaquis were retreating slowly under fire, covering the retreat of their women and children. The Mex. soldiers were firing from eight hundred yards. This was kept up most of a day. One Yaqui in particular, a big fine-looking fellow with a slashing good outfit under him, rode up and down the skirmish-line, brandishing his rifle and yelling in Mex. at the enemy, "Come on, you Carranza ladrones, move up closer! Come to three hundred yards and fight like men!" But the Mex. respects a Yaqui's marksmanship. He knows he counts every cartridge and does not shut his eyes and pull trigger as do many Mex.

Several of these scraps have taken place just below here lately and naturally reports have gone in to military officials hereabout, which has busied the U. S. border troops somewhat. They have picked up straggling Yaquis from time to time, but have killed only one that I know of, and that but a short distance east of my camp.

NOW I am going to say something about the negro soldier, as the subject was opened up in "Camp-Fire" a few issues back. For the last two years that I have been in here I have seen almost daily troopers from D and E Troop, 10th U. S. Cavalry, the same boys who were in Mex. with Pershing. Members of the border patrol, camped but a short walk below my camp. I have had many dealings with them. I have been of service to them and *vice versa*—I guess the biggest debt is in their favor. Now, like all rules, there are exceptions to all classes, and the negro soldier is no exception to that. As a whole, I have found them courteous, gentlemanly, generous, soldierly, and when you consider the uniform they wear, "soldierly" means a whole lot. They are slaves to duty. And, with but one or two exceptions (individual), I have no kick. (I keep chickins!) They are children, but that is no fault of theirs.—ALEX. MCLAREN.

WHEN we began using Hugh Pendexter's tales of the early days of this country I felt it necessary to put up an argument at Camp-Fire to the effect that so long as a man gave us a good story we ought not

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to mind if he gave us along with it a lot of sound historical knowledge and a better understanding of the making of our country. My remarks were not needed. Few of our stories have been devoured with such eagerness as have these tales of our country's past. There are plenty of real Americans, native-born, who welcome so pleasant a method of learning what our school-books merely skeletonize, and plenty of real Americans, new to our shores, who are glad to learn more of their new country by becoming familiar with her stirring and splendid past.

Here is something from Mr. Pendexter on his two-part novel that begins in this issue:

Norway, Maine.

I have followed the historical outline quite closely, and have sought to give a comprehensive view of the border when Spain played her best cards. The description of McGillivray follows the estimate of historians, and I have put no words in the mouth of this remarkable man that he might not have spoken. Tonpit is a composite picture of two men whom James R. Gilmore, in his "John Sevier," heartily condemns, but who he admits in his preface, are viewed more leniently by others. I have made Tonpit more of a romantic character than either of the two men described by Gilmore. John Watts of course is real, as is Dragging-Canoe and Old Tassel.

On the whole it's a faithful fiction-picture of the time and events and I have taken but few liberties in fictionizing. The Western settlements were disowned and did form the State of Franklin, which existed three years, with Sevier as governor. A most astonishing situation. Sevier never has received the historical distinction his remarkable and intensely patriotic career deserves. He was a Commonwealth builder, a greater Indian fighter than George Rogers Clark, and the most feared man by Indians the border ever produced. Major Hubbard, the "Killer," lived. Jackson, Polcher, Hajason, the girl Elsie, are fiction. But there were many scamps to play the rôles I've fastened on to Polcher and Hajason; and doubtless many young rangers pursuing under similar difficulties as sweet maids as Elsie.—PENDEXTER.

YOU remember the strange message that was found on the coast of Nova Scotia and sent to Camp-Fire by one of our comrades who wished help in deciphering it? It was sent in perfect good faith by this comrade as you will see by the following letter. And once again it shows how our Camp-Fire brethren are scattered all over the earth, wandering, wandering, wandering, and yet always with us when our council-fire is started and we gather to exchange experiences.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

In 1910, when I was something more of a boy than I am now, I shipped from Bridgetown, Barbados, on the Finnish tramp *Merkador*, Captain Funcke, flying the Russian flag.

SHE hailed from Helsingfors and was owned by an old man there who had never made a trip on her. I and a friend, who is now located in Panama, signed the papers before the Russian consul. We had come across into the West Indies from Central America and were waiting for a chance to ship out for South America. The *Merkador* had brought a load of pyrites from Spain to a U. S. port and had picked up a cargo of lumber in a southern Mississippi port for Rio. She had put in for coal. By a great amount of talk and with the aid of Mr. Spiller, who had recently been located in Colon, we got the captain to agree to take us on at the stipulated rate of one shilling each for the trip. We filled our bunkers and built other bunkers on deck and filled them with coal, for coal was cheaper here than it was in South America and Captain Funcke was a careful man. We sailed from Bridgetown, tilting at an uneasy list from the deck bunkers and the top cargo of lumber we carried.

THERE is a heavy north current up the Brazilian coast and Captain Funcke put far to the eastward to avoid it and save coal if he did not save time, and we were at one time almost in sight of the African coast. However, we never saw land for eighteen days and never sighted a ship until we were near Rio, when we sighted a cattle boat *en route* for England.

Captain Funcke was a fine man who spoke fluent and perfect English. We dined at his table, where he would have dined alone otherwise, on potted fowl, fruit soup and delicacies from every port in the world. We smoked cigars and cigarettes that he had picked up in their native lands and we drank various kinds of wines. Captain Funcke claimed he had not taken a drink of water in eighteen years and he did not take one on this trip. Also he had never been drunk in his life. He drank coffee and wine with his meals and did not drink anything between meals.

HE TAUGHT us navigation, which any man can learn in two weeks, and we taught him the "Harmony Kid roll" with a pair of celluloid dice. He always claimed that if the cruise had been longer we would have owned both ship and cargo. We also read books, talked, played checkers, and contended in acrobatic feats on a horizontal bar the ship's carpenter erected on deck and came off second best in this for the Captain could do the giant swing and other stunts we could not do. On the latter end of the voyage we began the forty-two day fast that we thought was a world's record until we later learned that a man had fasted under guard for *ninety-four* days. In the meantime we did various things to kill the time, for eighteen days is a long time for a landlubber to be at sea. I'll say it is!

ONE of the things we did was to write our names and home addresses on slips of paper and put them in bottles with the request that the finder would write us when picked up. I suppose we used thirty Swedish punch, Spanish wine, or other kinds of bottles for this purpose. One day in searching around for bottles, we came across an old dirty one that had been lying around and was full of

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dust and cobwebs. The idea came to us to write a message purporting to come from some Captain Kid that would put the natives to searching for treasure on the coast where it was picked up. We hunted up a scrap of dingy paper and, after much consideration and draughting, evolved one that could not be deciphered, my friend making the suggestion to change "POR" to "PAR" and both of us chuckling at the expression "Captain Blackburne," an account of whom we had been reading. The first line was not intended to mean anything except veiled insinuations as to directions and the quick assertion "el venge pirot," or that the pirate was coming and that the writer was acting in great haste. The rest of the message was intended for the chance finder to dope out "Buried some gold" from "Bure Desimgild," and I believe we wrote it in capitals.

THESE are the facts in connection with the mysterious MS. found by some one, I do not know where, and sent to Camp-Fire by I do not know whom. It was intended for some ignorant native and was written to kill a few minutes of a voyage. I certainly never expected to see it crop up through *Adventure*, which was not then in existence, and feel like a boob that it has cropped up. I will give three swift kicks free to any man who has tried to dope it out, and will stand convicted of perpetrating a very silly hoax. It is only that I consider the facts should be made known that I have forced myself to acknowledge my part in this affair and also with the hope that if any of the other bottles were found with my real name and address contained in them that the finders will drop us a line and say where and under what circumstances they were picked up. This might prove of value in showing the distances such objects will drift.—EDGAR YOUNG.

You can see that it was not an easy thing for Edgar Young to write that letter. It was just a prank designed to help while away weary days. All of us play our little games and we may be glad if they are no more harmful than this one. Yet we don't always like to own up to them years afterward, when we've begun to wonder why on earth we played them, and our thanks go to Edgar Young for preferring to own up to that by-gone game rather than to let our Camp-Fire follow a wrong trail.

Most of us, including myself, while we realized the possibility of a hoax, took the matter seriously enough to work over it, so it is up to us to laugh and be cheerfully ready to take up the next one. Better to follow a score of false trails than to miss the right one through fear of making a mistake.

And has any of you found one of the bottles whose message was *not* a hoax?

A WORD from one of our many comrades who have been sojourning in Germany since our troops occupied Hun territory and gave Americans a chance to study the Hun at home and at close range. This particular American was not taken in by the characteristic Hun propaganda for pulling the wool over the eyes of his conquerors and making them think he was a pretty nice chap after all.

And, thank heaven, our boys back from the other side return with less reverence for our political parties and with a keener eye for the country's interest than for a party's interests. Look at the Republican party, for instance, abandoning its usual position and opposing an increased appropriation for the air service merely because the Democratic party had changed *its* usual position and favored the increase. What are the country's interests to the Republican Senators and Representatives if it seems paying party tactics to abandon them? One of the big parties is no whit better than the other, and the Socialist party no better than either of them. Nor is any other of the parties who have been prostituting the country's interests for their own, betraying the trust of the people for the sake of spoils, personal advancement and party interests.

I hope our boys back from service are going to war again, and this time against party politicians and public officials who serve everybody and everything before they serve the public.

Germany, May 26, 1919.

My state of mind on the Hun question is even worse now that I have spent 8 more weeks since I wrote you. I met a lot of Boches who had spent from five to a dozen years in America and some had even taken out their first papers—they gave me even better lines on the question. The snake is only scotched and we must look out. They all want to come to U. S. and of course we will let them. What in —— is our Government doing—scrapping over Democrats and Republicans when they should be re-united on a common policy? —

A NEW member of our writers' brigade follows Camp-Fire custom and rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine.

All the same, Algot Lange to the contrary notwithstanding, I'm from Missouri on this sixty-foot snake question. It's quite possible, as Mr. Friel says, that there are some of that length but, like him, I've never seen any (no, I've never been in Brazil) and there seems to be no fully established record of any of that length. This question came up at Camp-Fire years ago. One of you was going to send

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me a fifty-foot skin but it never arrived. Mr. Ditmars, the reptile specialist of the Bronx Zoo, puts the limit, if I remember rightly, down somewhere in the thirties. I don't say there are no sixty-footers, but—well, let's see one.

Brooklyn.

About the dainty little reptile which figures in this story. The Brazilian *sucuruju* (or *sucuriu*) is the Goliath of snakes—the anaconda, whose scientific name is *Eunectes murinus*. By the way, he should not be confounded with the *surucucu*, which is a very venomous rattler. Their Brazilian names are similar, and they both belong to the same club, but that's about all they have in common. *Sucuruju* is an aquatic boa, haunting the swamps and rivers of the dense tropical forests, where he lies in the water with only his head out, or hangs out on a limb over the water, or lurks along the bank wherever he is likely to find a free lunch. He is said to be the only boa which has a savage disposition. Maybe that's because his belly is so big that he doesn't get a square meal very often.

PERHAPS some of the snakeologists will rise up and tell you that the anaconda is not really a boa, because his snout is covered with plates instead of small scales. All right, let 'em. This tale is not a hair-splitting technical treatise, but a story told by a Brazilian rubber-worker, to whom the "big snake" is a boa, or *sucuruju*. And I dare say some folks, on reading of a 60-footer, will voice the classic remark of the old farmer who went to the circus and saw the giraffe: "——! There ain't no such animal!" All right again. I never saw a 60-footer myself, and I rise to remark that whenever I do I'm going to bust all ancient and modern records for a fast getaway. All the same, I have no doubt that reptiles of this size exist in that particular region. Algot Lange records killing one on the Itecoahy (an affluent of the Javary), which was 56 feet long. He also mentions another, killed by the rubber-workers, whose length was 52 feet 8 inches, and states that the rubber-workers told him the *sucuruju* grew even larger.

While his 56-footer was being skinned he told his men that North Americans would not believe so large a snake existed, and one of them replied in an offended tone:

"Sir, you say your people in the north will not believe we have snakes like this, or even larger. That is an insult to Brazilians. Yet you tell us that in your town Nova York there are *barracaos* (houses) that have thirty-five or even forty stories on top of each other! How do you expect us to believe such an improbable tale as that?"

So there you are. There is no particular reason for supposing that these two snakes mentioned were the largest in South America. The one killed by Lange was coiled in a seven-foot cone on a sand-bar, where it was spied by Lange's men while paddling by moonlight. The *sucuruju*, you know, is a night-feeder.

WHEN the scientific gentlemen assert that no snake grows longer than 35 feet or thereabouts, you must remember that they base their declarations only on the specimens whose existence has been solemnly attested by somebody of their own scientific clan. It is quite obvious that such a leviathan as the gigantic *sucuruju* of the Amazonian headwaters is not likely to come under their observation, since he is seldom seen by white men, and the difficulties in the way of bringing him out of that infernal jungle are almost insuperable. It must also be remembered that all of that vast low-land region extending from the great El Tapado swamps of Bolivia around *via* the Javary to the Amazon is a reptilian paradise, where all conditions are conducive to the development of this form of life to enormous proportions.

I HAVE been told, and believe it to be true, that in those matted swamps there exist strange creatures which the scientific world knows nothing about—grotesque survivals and perversions of prehistoric things without a name. That this is not based merely on Indian tales is indicated to my mind, at least, by the fact that farther north, in Colombia, huge prehistoric animals survived until quite recently. Even science admits this: for A. H. Keane, F. R. G. S., states that "there is reason to believe that some of the huge extinct animals—megatheriums, glyptodons, taxodons, horses of earlier types and mastodons—which formerly abounded in Colombia, survived till comparatively recent times, and in any case were almost certainly associated with primitive man. Mr. R. B. White refers to necklaces from Indian graves made of the molar-fangs of mastodons, "so well preserved that they could scarcely have been fossils." Now if these enormous brutes lived in Colombia until quite recently, when they were wiped out by changing climatic conditions, is there any good reason why huge reptiles should not still be living in the swamp country, where everything favors their survival? In this connection, listen to the incident related by Charles Johnston Post, who passed down the Rio Beni and Madeira from Bolivian gold-diggings:

"THE night before we left Riba Alba an Indian was brought around to tell me an experience. He was a rubber scout who hunted up possible new areas of rubber trees. Somewhere, about a couple of hundred miles back in the interior from this settlement, he had come across the trail of an animal unfamiliar to him—and from his savage infancy such forest lore had been his sole academic curriculum; it was a trail like a snake—but not a snake! It was approximately three feet in width, and there were feet-marks on either side of the trail like a turtle's flippers—but only two. He had not followed it, for he was afraid. About a week later, in the shallow lagoon of one of the great lakes that are known to exist in that part, although no white man has yet penetrated to them, he saw a long neck rise out of the water. And it had a head on it. A snake's neck? he was asked. No, he insisted it was not a snake, he knew snakes. It was a neck with a head on it, something new. Then he fired at it, and it disappeared—and that was all.

"He had described, in the combined circumstances, a possible plesiosaur. What he saw I do not know, but when an Indian wants to romance his animals have the regulation iridescent eyes and spout flames. No combination of two overlapping trails could deceive him; he was adept on

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animal trails, nor would such a commonplace incident as an overlapped trail stir his imagination. He had never seen a circus poster, or an illustrated treatise on paleontology, but he indicated the existence of some animal closer, at least to the plesiosaur than any known and distant descendant."

OF COURSE, no scientist would ever believe this. He would demand that this thing be photographed, weighed, measured, bottled up, and delivered to him with the seals unbroken, accompanied by a mass of affidavits. Personally, I am willing to believe this Indian saw what he said he saw; I am not especially ignorant or credulous either. Compared with the misshapen monsters which may be still living in that swamp country where the Amazonian rivers rise, a reptile such as an overgrown *sucuruju* is nothing much to worry about. However, if you want to play safe in this snake story, you can chop a few feet off the tail (no pun intended) and make him only as long as eight or nine tall men. Nine 6-foot men would come to 54 feet, which is two feet less than Lange's 56-footer. Personally, I'd rather stand pat on the 10-man length: but do as you please.

There, I've written you quite a long drool in regard to this snake story, and you can doll it up for the Camp-Fire to suit yourself. Hope it doesn't sound like an ill-natured knock at the scientists, for I've met quite a few scientific men and found them mighty fine fellows—in fact, I've belonged to a couple of scientific societies myself. All the same, they're the most skeptical folks in the world.—A. O. FRIEL.

Since writing the above I've thought of a little change I'd like to make regarding the *surucucú*, which I dismissed with the brief statement that he is only a rattler. As this is likely to make folks think of a little three-foot side-winder, which is not exactly fair to the Brazilian reptile, I'd like to add the *sucuruju* should not be confused with the *surucucu*, whose society name is *Lachesis rhombeatus*, but who is more commonly known as the bushmaster. The latter is not to be sneezed at either, unless the sneezer is at a safe distance from the sneezee. He is a thick, heavy brute, grows to a length of ten feet, and is extremely venomous—sure death within half an hour. The Brazilian names of these two squirmy gentry are similar, and they both move in the highest circles of snakedom, but that's about all they have in common.—A. O. F.

ADVENTURE, biologically considered—what is it? I said that S. B. H. Hurst's theory would have to be barred from further discussion because unsuited and awkward for a general argument of this kind, but I suppose I need not bar out the following on that account since it treats this topic only in a minor way. Also, the other side, as here represented, is entitled to one argument in reply to Mr. Hurst's. And, if I may horn in with my own opinion, I don't believe either sex or food is the answer. Nor do I ever lie down peaceably under the ruling that man is just an animal, though "biologically considered" certainly justifies that treatment of the question.

Detroit, Mich.

I read with interest what S. B. H. Hurst had to say on the subject, and frankly don't agree with him.

I DON'T believe that the impulse which bids us go out to the far places of the earth is for the gratification of the sex interest. Mr. Hurst presents us a picture showing man running after women, which of course he does, but not so much as he does after his first god, gold. In other words, man has two gods, the first being gold and the second woman. Man is an animal (as I think all will agree, after watching events of the last four years) and if we study our "lesser" brethren of the fields, we'll find that the instinct which causes them to go into the next valley is for nothing more nor less than for the food which may be there. That is all the "animals" need—food.

Man having shed his natural covering, needs an artificial coat to keep him warm, needs food and other things to make him comfortable and so must acquire gold (or money) with which to purchase these things. His home town may not offer him the opportunity, so he goes to the next one. It is just as bad, so he goes on to the next, and then to the next until he has been practically all over the continent, and very often goes to the next continent.

I know a young fellow born in India, who went to England, then came here, whose reason for doing so was that he "thought he could do better here."

I have also met quite a few fellows, who I think could be called adventurers, who always say "This town's no good. I'm goin' here or there—and when I make a good stake, believe me, boy, I'm gonna settle down." There is the whole thing—when he makes his stake.

IF WE study the lives of the "great" adventurers we'll find the same thing. It would be hard to convince any one that Drake and Raleigh and their swashbuckling crews, adventurers all, came to the new world for the women it contained. I think most of us will agree that gold was the thing uppermost in their minds. Take our more modern adventurers, Stefansson and Shackleton, and one could hardly accuse them of adventuring into the arctic wastes after the few greasy Esquimaux women to be found there. They go usually because of the reward which is given them on their return.

NOW having said that animals roam in search for food, and man roams in search of that which will bring him food, I think the spirit of adventure is nothing more than the old predatory instinct which bids us to go out and over the hills and into the next valley and have a "look around and see the country" and "mebbe find somethin'."

Of course, I'm basing this on the belief that the man who roams from town to town in search for "something better" is as much an adventurer as he who roams to the out places of the world. Money means more than food and clothing—it means power if we have enough of it, and so we search for it.

Sorry to take up the time if I haven't said anything new.—ALLEN STUART REID.

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THE following interesting letter from one of our comrades will be eagerly read by many of you and will undoubtedly bring out some differences of opinion from others of you who know Latin America.

The Argentine, for example. Do the rest of you agree with Dr. Sargent's (Ph. not M.D. or D.D. or D.D.S.) estimate? And do others of you make Honduras your first choice?

My own little personal feeling is that the little old U. S. is a pretty good place itself, with a very wide range of climate, conditions and opportunities. Also, being Americans, don't we owe our country something in the way of standing by her in her development, particularly in these critical times?

Hacienda "La Manuelita,"
Palmira, El Valle, Colombia.

Fellow *Adventure* Readers and Friends: With all good wishes I salute you one and all.

During the past four years I have received from many people, some one hundred and seven to be exact, queries concerning the feasibility of establishing a colony or a home in Latin American lands. These letters came from all sorts and conditions of men and women, viz:

5 women. (These did not state whether married or single.)

11 men. (Who did not state whether married or single.)

65 men with families.

26 single men.

To the most of these I replied; but in a recent mail I received a letter from a relative and four friends (all on active service) asking about the same thing. Therefore I decided to send this letter to *Adventure* and will be only too glad to go into details with any person holding an *Adventure* card with serial number.

In one of his letters to me, the Great American (Roosevelt) said: "Every great war has resulted in a change of population, and incidentally new and powerful states have sprung into existence. The sovereign states to the south of us, offer great opportunities to a man who has the real gumption of the old American pioneer in him. Many people look with increasing suspicion on the acts of the people in power for the moment, and one of the results of the present Great War, in my opinion, will be an increase in immigration to other lands."

A FEW mails ago I received, as stated above, a letter from a near relative, asking all sorts of questions *in re* settling in a tropical country. My relative asked questions enough to fill a pamphlet, while any sort of intelligent replies to them would fill two large volumes, but boiled down the questions were:

Is it possible? Is it practicable? Can money be made? Are the countries healthful? How much capital is necessary? What outfit is necessary? What crops can be grown? What country is the best? How do I get there? Whom shall I write to? Are the people civilized? And others of minor importance.

To the questions Is it possible? Is it practicable? Can money be made? I answer unqualifiedly YES. To the others as follows:

Are the countries healthful? Yes. If a man takes care of himself, behaves himself and takes his quinin, sleeps under a mosquito bar and is not a glutton, he will have nothing to fear ordinarily. If he does not do these things or follow the well-known rules of health for the tropics, he will be sick a goodly portion of the time.

How much capital is necessary? This is a hard question. One man with five hundred dollars to start with and plenty of "gumption" can make a success and a big success, while another man with five thousand dollars will be a miserable failure.

The great secret lies in the patience possessed by the person in question. The only cost attached to the land, say twenty-two hundred acres, is the surveying, and this is very reasonable. The stamped paper required by the courts of all Latin American countries will cost about a dollar—and that will be about all.

The next item of expense is the dwelling and its furnishing. A settler should have hens, geese, ducks, turkeys, pigs, goats, and a couple of good dogs. He will be able to raise in his dooryard, chocolate, sugar-cane, rice, bananas, plantains, yucca, beans, corn, tomatoes, oranges, lemons, pineapples, papayas, squash, and many other tropical fruits and vegetables. The jungle and the forest will supply him with all kinds of game, and the rivers, lakes, and sea with fish, oysters, turtles, etc., and the seashore with salt. Pepper can be grown. The forests supply the lumber or bamboo and roofing for his house and fences, although the latter are not at all necessary if his locality is not settled as would be most likely.

The answer to the question, What are the best crops? really comes in here, so I will answer it at this time. All depends on the altitude and geographic location. In the far south and in the high mountain regions, all the Temperate Zone crops can be raised, but if in the Torrid Zone, and on the coast or in the low lands, the tropical crops hold the attention of the settler.

I have seen colony after colony meet with the most miserable kind of failure and the Red Cross convey them back to the "States" absolutely penniless, but these failures have been due to the general laziness or lack of bodily care (*in re* health) on the part of the settlers. Only too often do the settlers try to do too much at the start. If I were going to settle in the tropics in the highlands, I'd try wheat and sheep; if on the coast, coconuts and, if possible, cattle. The coffee and chocolate crops are excellent for certain places, but they are few and far between and I do not recommend these crops to the new settler. A few chocolate trees will furnish the settler with the very best drink nature gives and consequently should be planted.

The man who goes to a new country in the tropics with a small capital should, after getting his titles to his land and his house erected, begin to plant coconuts and improve, little by little, the land in the immediate vicinity. Build for the future. Then wait for results. The coconut is the big payer and the easiest crop to raise, yet there is a lot to learn about coconut culture, but even the greenest novice from the center of N. Y.

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City, who has never seen a blade of wild grass, can, if he has patience, make a success of coconuts. Therefore my reply to the question, What crops can be grown? is: A great many different kinds, but the best is coconuts.

NOW comes the query, What outfit is necessary? That largely depends on the man and his ambition. A personal outfit should always include quinin, a mosquito-bar, a .30-30 Winchester, a .22 Remington, a good machete, a camp cot or navy hammock, a compass, a pocket magnifying glass, a watch, blankets, clothing, hightop boots, colored glasses, Epsom salts, note books, toilet articles, etc. I will be very glad to give any interested person a complete list of my own outfit and the one I sent my relative.

WHAT country is best? This is the most difficult of all the questions. I strongly advise the would-be immigrant to stay away from the Argentine and Colombia, while the Allied citizen is a *persona non grata* in Venezuela. Mexico and Guatemala are not suitable lands in which to settle at the present moment nor will they be until we get a Government in the United States which will look after the citizens of that country abroad. Argentina is full of nothing except hot air and thousands of "white men" seeking employment. Colombia frankly does not want any foreigners to settle except the Germans and is especially bitter against the American. They still hold to the Panama grudge (Note: Panama is still, officially, a part of Colombia). Costa Rica and Salvador have scarcely any public lands. Nicaragua is O K and under American protection, but its people are shy of foreigners, they are suspicious, and so, for my part, I strongly recommend Honduras. Honduras has not a very large population but they are good friends, and always have been, of the American and are seeking settlers from our country. The public lands are excellent and safe and the present Government is more than willing to help. There are none of the obnoxious customs laws that nearly every country on this hemisphere has.

I KNOW of a place in Honduras where there is a huge salt-water lake, some 20 or 30 miles long, and about 1 to 6 miles wide, separated from the sea by a wide strip of land some one-half mile across, which strip is covered with coconut trees. The land side of the laguna has pine trees running down to the laguna's edge and is possessed of a fine salubrious climate. Here are great open grazing lands with thousands of wild cattle. The land is public, the cattle and the coconut trees belong to no one. Here would be an ideal spot for a colony or for a big ranch of several hundred thousand acres. The pine trees and open savanas run directly back to the mountains and there are no bad jungles or swamps near by. It is the best spot I know of in any of the Americas and the editor of this magazine can vouch for the fact that I know Latin America fairly well. I will be glad to inform any private person interested more about this locality, but I can say that I have advised my relative to go there, and if he does I shall probably buy a large tract of land there myself for future profit.

How do I get there? Talk with the nearest ticket agent, either railroad or steamship. If away from either, write to the United Fruit Company at N. Y. City and make inquiries. Better still, write "Ask Adventure." Be sure and enclose your stamp and also tell the editor what country you want information about.

ARE the people civilized? I do not care to answer that question. Some people say yes, others say no, but taking all in all into consideration, I believe that the Peruvian, the Chilean and the Hondurenian are the best of the bunch and of course the higher classes of all these lands are refined, cultured and educated people (accordcording to their view-points). Personally outside of Colombia, I've no kick coming except with Mexico.

The most important factor in the consideration of any tropical land as a permanent place of residence is the glamor of romance that writers have cast over it. The *first thing to do* is to strike this factor out, root, branch and tendril. There's no romance, absolutely none. The man or the woman who comes to one of these lands to make a home will enter a country as matter of fact and as sordid as his own homeland, the only difference being the climate, the people, and their offspring.

Don't imagine money can be made here easily, it *can't*. You've got to work and work mighty hard, but there's a great success awaiting the worker. The settler who cultivates, or uses his land as it should be cultivated or used, *and who sticks, and who takes care of his health*, can at the end *of five years take a rest for the rest of his life—but five years is the minimum!*

MOST everybody likes to read about the tropical moon, the wonderful palms and flowers, the marvelous productiveness of the soil and the great fortunes amassed, likewise the dark-eyed señoritas and the haughty, but cordial and generous Dons and Hidalgos, but nobody has ever found the latter outside of a novel while the other things have as *ever present attendants—poisonous* snakes, mosquitoes, flies, ants, vines and flowers and most dangerous of all, poisonous water. There are terrible swamps and jungles and in the cities and towns, vice, squalor, and minor political upheavals, but thank heaven and Roosevelt—the day of the revolution is past.

FINALLY, should there be any of the readers of this article who are thinking of going to the Tropics to settle, one word of advice: Go slow. Figure the new game from every angle. Write to the consul-general at the capital of the country in which you intend settling. INVESTIGATE and be sure you know your companions and the man who is the prime mover in your colony scheme. Write the United Fruit Company, write any one you know or know of who is reliable. Get all the data you can. Don't pay any attention whatsoever to *prospectuses, novels, story books, and books of travel*. The writers of the books of travel mean well, but invariably they see a country as their hosts want them to see it, and a man with a well-filled purse and well-filled belly will see things through a different pair of spectacles from the man who is hungry and with but precious little money. I have yet to read a fair-minded book on any part of South America. But I do most heartily

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recommend any intending settlers to look into the offerings of Honduras. *Stay away from the Argentine. Don't get tangled up to any thing that purports to come from that country. It is a land of rich men and there are mighty few openings for any one. I KNOW as I have a ranch there and know the people like a book.*

The man who wants to build a home for himself, his family and his posterity, should, if he can't do anything at HOME, look into Honduras, and if not satisfied there look into Nicaragua, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, or our very good friend Brazil.

I will be very glad to reply to any questions, if I can, intelligently, made to me by any holder of an *Adventure* card.—J. W. SARGENT.

IMMIGRATION. Won't Congress have sense enough and patriotism enough to stop it at least for a period of years until we can Americanize the millions whom we have already let in and not Americanized or, generally speaking, even tried to Americanize? Are our Congressmen afraid? Of offending Capital? Of losing the "foreign vote"? Think of Americans too cowardly to defend American interests because they fear to lose the "foreign vote"! Patriots? Traitors.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue Harold A. Lamb gives us some illuminating glimpses into ancient history:

New York.

"The Rider of the Gray Horse" happens to be a battle-cry of the Rajputs. These gentry were excellent fighters and possessed a great deal of pride.

Early in their history one Rajput prince was chasing another after a battle. As it chanced, they were brothers, and enemies. I think one was Prithvi-Raj. Overtaking his brother, whose horse was done up, instead of killing him he offered his own fresh gray mount. And returned to his C. O. to surrender himself in his brother's place.

This act is significant of the Rajput chivalry in the middle ages. The fact that they took this phrase—"the rider of the gray horse"—for a war-cry shows how highly they held personal honor. Any one who knows of the annals of the Raj understands how jealously this honor was guarded. Chitore was the stronghold of the Raj. Three times it was attacked and taken—twice by Moghuls—and each time, instead of surrendering, the women burned themselves, and the men put on the yellow robes of death, ornamented with pearl necklaces, to fight to the last man.

AS TO the story of Nur-Jahan, this follows history. Being loved by Jahangir, when the latter came to the Mogul throne in 1605, Nur-Jahan's husband, Sher Afghan, was marked for death. Nur-Jahan, who was ambitious and returned Jahangir's love, was likewise marked for destruction by Sher Afghan, the Tiger Lord.

The affair was complicated by the fact that the late emperor, Akbar, father of Jahangir, regarded Nur-Jahan's beauty as dangerous to his son. Akbar had married Nur-Jahan to Sher Afghan to keep her out of Jahangir's hands. When Jalal-Ud-Din Akbar died, it was a case of which member of the eternal triangle could kill the other first.

Jahangir won. Sher Afghan, being under no delusion as to his fate, calmly sabered the official Jahangir despatched to bring him to court, and died sword in hand.

So it happened that Nur-Jahan survived the enmity of Akbar and Sher Afghan. She was little more than a Persian adventuress; but she knew her own mind and possessed the beauty of Helen of Troy. Incidentally she made an excellent queen.

As to the bonpas, the priests of Bon—they were a branch of the lamas known as the black hats. The followers of the Dalai Lama were then known as the yellow hats. The worship of Bon was of a phallic nature—based on magic, and erotic ceremonial. It resembled, and was allied to, that of Kali. Nur-Jahan, being a Mohammedan, was outlawed by both Buddhists and Hindus.—H. A. LAMB.

AS THIS comrade says, I think that those of us who have really hit the trail are not likely to criticize our magazine's stories as "impossible." Mistakes, yes. They are quick to call attention to a mistake by one of our writers, particularly if it is a mistake in local color or custom. But they themselves have seen too many strange things to question the truth of a new thing because it seems strange or improbable on the face of it. And very often, like this comrade, they themselves are familiar with the very incidents that one of our writers has woven into his fiction tale and that seems so "impossible" to one who does not know the facts.

I have long been a member of Camp-Fire and never until recently have I heard any criticism (adverse) of our magazine and this was to the effect that too many of the stories were "impossible." Now I wish to state that in several stories I have had the pleasure of reading in *Adventure* I have found things which I know to be true and there are lots of other stories which read like straightforward facts but with the settings of which I am unfamiliar; perhaps some of the rest of Camp-Fire members know them. You who are familiar with some parts of this little world, how many times have you found stories under the guise of fiction that you knew to be true?

Now the next time you hear one of these molly-coddles knock our magazine just tell him to shake the grass off his feet and go out and see what the world looks like. Ask him if he ever thanked God for water to drink that was so yellow it looked like iron-rust, or if he was ever out in the woods or the swamps with a compass and a gun, or ever been outside of harbors in the fo'castle, or away from the States "on his own." It is the stay-at-home boys to whom these things are impossible, and I hope the editor will edit this enough to permit its being published in Camp-Fire to discourage some who would criticize.—ID. CARD 1649.

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LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

AS EXPECTED, the call for local meetings June twenty-fifth met with such slight response that, so far as the formation of Tens is concerned, for practical purposes it can be written off the books. But a main object was accomplished—the definite outlining of a means of procedure by which the people can regain control of their own public affairs —and there was splendid individual response. Scattered all over the country are men of all classes working earnestly for the program of democracy that has been presented in this department.

And that is a result to rejoice over. The seeds are being sown. Such things grow slowly, but the soil is fertile and the sun shines. Those democratic Americans who are awake and working are awaking others and setting them to the work of awaking still others in their turn.

And the pressure of public events will, sooner or later, force the others into the only thing that can gain and ensure real democracy in this country—real citizenship.

REVOLUTION is unintelligent, lacking in horse-sense. In Russia it may have been necessary. Not in this country. Here we have democratic machinery through which the people *can* bring about whatever they please, if they *will*. The trouble is that, having let our machinery fall into bad condition, it will take work, by the people, to make it do what is wanted. Rather than buckle down to that work and duty, some people advocate revolution by force. Partly through stupidity, partly through laziness, in some cases with selfish or criminal intent.

The real point is that no matter what form, theory or machinery of government we have, it will be rotten if we, the citizens who compose, make and carry it out, are rotten. In our present Government there are evils to be corrected and, more and more, Americans are coming to realize it. But too many Americans think it can be done by waving some kind of magic wand. Long-haired and short-haired specialists alike are presenting magic wands for our attention—Socialism, Bolshevism, Anarchy and all the rest. They are too learned, or too unthinking, to see the simple truth that any one of these forms we might adopt would be fully as rotten as our present form if we ourselves remain as rotten citizens as we are now. You can't build a sound house out of rotten bricks.

The advocates of force-revolution are even stupider. Instead of lazily doing it with a magic wand, they want to do it lazily with a magic ax. In addition to making the fruitless change, they want to make it so suddenly and roughly that the change itself would be disastrous even if the new form were worth changing to. After they get the new one they expect everything to be magically sweet and lovely, for they are as dull-witted and behind the times as is the dullest and slowest of the old-school specialists. Have they so wonderful a system that it will operate beautifully even if the citizens are the same corrupt or careless ones we have at present? So wonderful that it doesn't make any difference what it is made of? Well, if your egg is bad, does it matter whether you poach, boil or fry it? And can you make a rotten egg fresh by stirring it violently?

Whenever I see a specialist arguing for some particular form of government or economic system in this country I see a man arguing in favor of frying or boiling or some other particular method of cooking a rotten egg. Whenever I see a revolutionist I see a man doing the same thing, only he will tell you, if you ask him, that the rotten egg will soon be all right because he's going to begin by smashing the shell and stirring the contents with an ax.

The sane thing to do is to get a fresh egg. After that, the manner of cooking won't matter so much. But of course if you smash the shell and stir the contents with an ax you may not have any egg.

IT HAS occurred to me that some of you may think I'm working for better citizenship and more real democracy because I like to do so. I do *not* like to. It would be nearer the mark if I said I hated doing it. My regular work leaves me little time or strength for my personal activities or amusements. For more than ten years, aside from the need of keeping in physical condition, practically all this spare time and strength has gone to this work for better citizenship. There are scores of other things I'd like to do, but I've given them up. Among other things, I used to write fiction for magazines; I wrote the last story in 1908. The citizenship work has been the white elephant of my life. Every day I swear at it. But I'm going to keep on doing it.

If you don't know why I'm going to keep on doing it you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

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VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

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Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure,* New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn in lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, postpaid, anywhere.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: Nov. and Dec., 1910, 50 cents each; March, 1911, 25 cents. Must be in good condition.—R. W. DEDEKIND, 1913 Parrish St., Philadelphia, Pa.

WILL SELL: Any issue 1917 and 1918, copies 5 cents each, post paid.—FRED E. WILKINS, Danvers, Mass.

WILL SELL: Mid-March, First April, Mid-April, Mid-May, First June, Mid-June, 1918; June, 1917. 10 cents per copy, plus carriage.—O. C. KLEIN, 2322 Washington St., Vicksburg, Miss.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's,* Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
B. W. BRINTNALL, 5527 Thirty-third Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, P. O. Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

10. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1
J. B. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

11. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 1
R. S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin. Hunting, fishing, trapping. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 3
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 4
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 7
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. Hawaiian Islands and China
P. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

20. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

21. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

22. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

23. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

24. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, Box 807A.—R. F. D. No. 10, Los Angeles, California. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

25. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

26. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

27. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Eagle Bird Mine, Washington, Nevada Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

28. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

29. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

30. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, 7 Place de Tertre, Paris, XVIII, France. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

31. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

32. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shot-guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shot-Guns (including foreign and American makes.) J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Major A. M. Lochwitzky.

Mining in Australia

GOLD, silver, copper, tin, take your choice. Though this great island continent already has given up fabulous riches from its mines, the land has hardly been scratched. Prospectors, how does that sound to you? From Australia, for instance, came the "Welcome Stranger" nugget, a lump weighing 2,248 ounces of raw, yellow gold—representing $50,000:

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Question:—"As a reader of *Adventure* and of the "Ask Adventure" bureau, I am listing some inquiries below:

I have heard that North Australia is extremely rich in precious metals that have not yet been extensively mined. Is that right?

Is it worth while for a young man to prospect in the gold producing fields of North Australia?

Would a man be grub-staked in any of the mining towns and be allowed to prospect for himself?

My chum and I were thinking of going there to try our luck at mining. Do you think there is any chance of success?

We are not particular how we live, as long as we can have a chance for some degree of success. By living I mean we would not expect first class housing or grub in these parts. We would expect to prospect for gold, or any other metal sufficiently valuable to warrant good returns for our work. Will you give me a list of metals found in this district?

Please describe the climatic conditions in North Australia."—F. E. J., London, Ont., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Goldie:—Australia is as full of precious metals as a dog is full of fleas, and, like the dog, Australia always keeps scratching, but she has not yet dug out more than a fraction of her resources. Yet the production of minerals in that country makes a very respectable showing. You have probably heard of the great gold rushes of Ballarat and Bendigo, back in the '50s, when the vaults of nature gave up undreamt-of treasures. Writing of the first discovery of gold in Victoria, the well-known author, E. J. Brady, says:

Even the most optimistic would hardly have believed that it was to herald the opening of a natural treasure-house which has yielded a value now approaching three hundred millions sterling—$1,500,000,000."

The state of Victoria was practically the pioneer of the mining industry in Australia but Western Australia has been bidding hard for supremacy in the production of gold. You doubtless remember the big Coolgardice and Kalgoorlie rushes of twenty-odd years ago, though the industry dates back in that state to 1886, from which time till the present about $645,000,000 worth of gold has been won from that section of the continent.

The history of mining in Australia is full of adventure and romance. Mineral wealth has been discovered in the most unexpected places and in the most remarkable circumstances. Take for instance the case of Broken Hill which, as its name indicates, is a ridge of broken hills, situated on the further edge of the western part of New South Wales, described by the explorer Sturt, as "the most worthless country in the world." This "worthless" country has since given to the world one of its richest silver-lead mines. Shareholders of the company operating this field are at the present time receiving dividends amounting to between $8,000,000 and $9,000,000 per annum.

The wonderfully rich silver and copper mines known as the Mount Lyell group, found on the western coast of Tasmania, and the extremely rich gold mine of Mount Morgan in Northern Queensland have also evidenced the remarkable prolific character of Australian mineral fields. It is a country in which anything might happen to the prospector, as instance, the finding of the famous "Welcome Stranger" nugget, weighing 2,248 ounces of pure gold and worth about $50,000. Yes, Australia is rich in precious metals.

You have opened up a big question in asking me whether it is worth while to prospect in Northern Australia, for this is a vast undeveloped territory which may yet give the world many surprises. Gold was first discovered in Northern Australia in 1869 and the opinion has been expressed that had it not been for bad management, this territory would have proved as productive as either Queensland or Western Australia. Whether this be so or not, the fact is certain that there is every indication of rich mineral deposits in the Northern Territory.

As to whether you would be grub-staked depends a good deal upon yourself and the confidence you might inspire. But I might say it is no uncommon thing for this to be done and, anyway, no man need starve on an Australian mining field.

You have as much chance for success as those who have made good fortunes in the past—but who can tell?

The metals found in Northern Australia are chiefly gold, tin, copper, woolfram and silver-lead.

The climate of Northern Australia is distinctly hot, but it is a heat that differs in character from other tropical countries, being drier and healthier. The health of the European population in the northern territory is distinctly good and the climatic conditions generally are, according to the Government Health Officer, absolutely compatible with the highest standards of health.

Canal Zone to California on Foot

IT CAN be done—has been done, though infrequently. In fact, Mr. Young, who describes the trip to this questioner, made most of the hike himself, through steaming jungles, across rolling, green prairies, through mountain bordered cañons where perhaps no white foot had ever passed before. He tells you how the hike can be made without hardship:

Question:—"Two of us are planning to hike from the Canal Zone to our homes in San Francisco, Cal.

Kindly give us all the dope on this that you can. Will a .32 automatic each be enough for the trip? Also what map shall we take for guide? And what is the best time of year to start in?

All the hiking we have ever done before—except when we have 'hit the grit'—has been for a few days around the foothills of California. I speak Spanish fluently enough to secure us the comforts of the road, so far as the natives are concerned whom we may encounter on the journey.

We desire to take the road that offers the greatest historical interest, so kindly suggest some literature to read up on so that we can get the greatest ultimate benefit from the trip. How long do you estimate it will take to get to the Calif. border, averaging 25 miles a day? As we are going to take a 4x5 camera (or would you suggest a different size?) and developing tank with the necessary equipment to develop negatives

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while on the way, please state what in your estimation are the absolute necessities that one needs for the trip.

I have been informed that it will be necessary to start from Costa Rica. Is this true?

What is the best to wear, particularly footgear; and in what form shall we carry our emergency funds, checks, gold, silver, and about how much?"—JACK STEWART, Gatun, C. Z.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—You can make the hike right from the Zone. There is a road leaving Empire that leads to Chorrera and meanders all the way up through the interior to David. The worst of this road is the twenty miles to Chorrera; from there it gets better. You strike a prairie there and this extends up through the interior all the way to the Costa Rican border, about 200 miles. There is another way of crossing over into the Changuenola Valley over the old cattle trail and going across to the town of Old Harbor (Puerto Viejo) on the Atlantic side and then hiking the beach trail to Limon and going to San José or Cartago from there and working your way from town to town into Nicaragua.

There is a regularly traveled road by river and trail from the Gran Lago which any native of San José can tell you about. Also you can make about a hundred miles by drifting north to the San Juan down the Sarapiquí or San Carlos, and up the San Juan to the lake, or catching the Rio Frio further west for the same purpose. On the other side of the lake at Granada there is a railroad 200 miles long running north to Corinto but it is better to leave this road about Leon or some of the other towns and keep to high ground. There are roads connecting most of the towns in this part of Nicaragua which are used by ox carts and mules and there is a trail through to Honduras which is frequently traveled. If you drift west far enough to get into Salvador you will strike a good ox-cart road for Guatemala; there is another road of this kind running from another part of Honduras to Zacapa. There is railroad track all the way from Guatemala City to San Francisco, crossing into Mexico at Ayutla (called Mariscal, also).

The way I came into Panama was from Puerto Limon to Old Harbor, across the mountain to the Sexola River, which is the border, and hiking down the banana road to Changuenola Junction, and by rail and launch to Bocas del Toro. You could go to Bocas from Colon, and back track this trip. However, I would advise keeping to the Pacific side for better climate and less rain. I made the trip back up through the interior, through Chorrera, and many miles in that direction and found it much better than the trip I originally made. So far as that is concerned you could take a boat from Panama City to David and strike the trail there. This will put you into a much better country for hiking purposes. However, if you want to make the full trip you can make it right from there by going to Empire and hitting that trail. The Zone is worse than anything else you will strike.

If you never have been over to Chorrera you will be surprised to see that prairie and see them running horses and cattle over there. There used to be a Mr. Nevill and a Mr. Allen living there in Gatun who owned farms at Chorrera. It may be that they are living over there now. The ponies they have over there are very small but very tough and I would suggest them as a better method than hiking up through the prairie for there are places where you will not see a tree for miles.

The thing to do is to avoid taking too much. A blanket is essential to sleep on and to roll your outfit in. Make a roll about the size of your body and then put it in a pair of overalls and buckle them on to it. Then tie back the legs for pack straps to the main part of the bundle. This gives you a flat strap to pack with.

I would take a spare suit of khaki, underwear, sox, and at least three pairs of heavy shoes (be sure and don't get barefooted like I did) and a half dozen half soles and heel taps, a shoemaker's hammer and a light last, a mosquito bar, bottle of quinine, bottle of salts, permanganate of potash, salt, mess-kit, aluminum frying pan, and a very few other essentials. I made the last 100 miles with nothing but a blanket.

There are small towns and settlements all the way up and you can buy small supplies from them. If your bundle is too bulky, tie the frying pan and shoes to the outside. If I ever had to hike that trip again, I would spend a couple of days making a frame, fitting into joints, of light wood or bambu, to stretch a mosquito bar over at night. I think I could make one that would only weigh a few pounds and I am sure it would be worth packing. The annoyance from mosquitoes, to say nothing of the danger of being bitten by them, is frightful.

It is pretty hard to average 25 miles per day on a long trip without you have recourse to horses and mules when it is easy to better that average. After you get 50 miles from the C. Z. you can hire them for a song and get a native to go along with you and bring them back. As far as that goes, I think you can buy a fair plug over at Chorrera for $40, which is double what he would cost you further up the trail. You could possibly sell him in David for almost as much as you gave for him, or you could sell him further on over in C. R. if he is holding up well on the trip. Why walk when you can ride? If you prefer to walk, get a donkey for a couple of dollars and make him carry the load.

You will surely be surprised at the open country after you get away from the Zone and you can make good time over it. There used to be launches running from Panama to the little port where the road leaves for Chorrera and you can arrange to have horses sent down to meet you at this port. or walk on up. There is fair hotel accommodations up there, of the kind. Most of the natives are a bunch of crooks that like to graft off of Canal people who come up here, but, at that, things are pretty cheap.

I think you better figure on from four to six months to make the hike through to California. After you have have walked five or six hundred miles you can make much better time than 25, if you want to, for a man gets hard as iron. But there are lots of things to stop and see and you will lose time in all of the large cities.

The dry season up in Central America is from Oct. to May. On the Atlantic side it is about like it is there in Gatun; it rains pretty nearly all the year round. But on the Pacific side the seasons are sharply divided. David is so much different from Gatun that you would not think they are in the same country.

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It does not rain all the time during the rainy season in Central America but rains pretty regularly, sometimes raining in the daytime and clearing up at night, and sometimes raining at night and clearing up in daytime. The roads get pretty bad but are not impassable.

The guns you mention will be plenty. So far as that goes nothing will molest you on the trip. I slept out for seven months and never needed a gun but one might when some animal prowled around us. The dangers are slight from any other cause except malaria and this can be avoided by taking two grains of quinine each night regularly and taking care to boil all drinking water whether it looks good or not, for a man can pick up a dose of dysentery easily.

Poor man's grub on the trail consists of ripe bananas with salt (you can live on these), boiled green bananas mashed for potatoes (very small with the milk in them), and fried bananas for meat; also large green bananas boiled for bread, yams, and fruit.

The best way to carry your money is in currency, wrapped in oiled paper, in a money belt, in bills of small denominations, and a pocket full of small silver. You can find exchanges in the cities of each country to change the silver into that of the *pais*, and American money is worth more than face value at banks and exchanges and is as good a thing as you can carry. Chinese stores will change bills for you and glad to do it.

I doubt whether you will be able to develop the films along the trail. My plan would be to take the camera and the films and ship them out from such places as San José, Guatemala City, etc.

Maine for Outdoor Sport

DON'T think the game has all been killed in Maine, or the big fish all caught, just because it lies so few hours from our great Eastern cities. Half the State is still semi-wilderness and more. And the bull moose still calls across the lakes of that granite, pine-clad State:

Question:—"I would like to get some information on hunting and fishing in Maine. What is the game found in Maine? Where is the best part of Maine to go to spend the Fall, Winter and Spring? I want to get where there is plenty of game and also on a stream of good fishing. Where do you think is the best place and what are the hunting laws and fishing laws of Maine?

Do you think that I could hunt and trap for a profit there? Where can I buy a good map of Maine? What will guides cost? And also what do you think I would need in the way of supplies? Do you think I could make hunting and trapping pay expenses?"—R. W. Overall, Santo Domingo City, D. R.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—There are many kinds of game found in the forests of Maine. Of the larger game there are deer, bear and moose, but the last is protected by law until Nov. 1st this year.

For smaller game, there are bob-cats, lynx, foxes, sable, black cat, mink, muskrat, and beaver. The last is protected by law.

There are many different parts of Maine where the game is quite plentiful: the northern part of Penobscot County, Somerset, Piscataquis, Aroostook, and Washington County.

Fishing is also very good in all of these localities. I have hunted in the northern part of Somerset and Piscataquis Counties with good success.

I will give you a summary of the hunting laws:

All non-residents must have a license for hunting or fishing. A hunting license costs $15 for the season. A fishing license is $2.15. The open season on most game is from Oct. 1st to Dec. 15th. Non-residents, when hunting or fishing, and building fires on wild land, must be accompanied by a registered guide.

If you know the trapping game, you might be able to make your expenses, or even better, as fur is very high at the present time.

The best map of the fish and game section that I know of is published by Dillingham of this city. The cost is $1. Guides receive from $3 to $5 per day for their services. This includes canoe and camping outfit.

The question of supplies would depend on where you were going and the length of your stay. They may be obtained at most places where you start in.

If you have had no experience in trapping, and need to employ a guide, I doubt if you could make a profit, but you certainly could have lots of sport and might break even.

A Vacation on French River, Canada

IT IS hard to find a better river to fish than the French. An almost virgin field, noted for its bass and maskinonge. Our expert tells you how to get there and gives some valuable information on the accommodations to be obtained:

Question:—"I would appreciate your giving me some information regarding a two or three week trip through your country; object, fishing and hunting.

I have been at the front in France for a year and can stand roughing it, although I would prefer to have some comforts.

Do not know anything to speak of about woodcraft. Do not care much for hiking. Had enough of that 'over there' to last me the rest of my life.

I want to do some bear, deer and other game shooting and some fishing. I have guns and a tackle and some personal equipment.

I probably would need a guide.

Can I rent a camp outfit, canoe, motor-boat, etc.?

I have a friend who may accompany me. Where should we go and how, and what will we need?

Can you put me in touch with a good guide who has lots of patience?

When is the best time to go? July, August or September would suit me best.

Is a Newton, .30 caliber, a good rifle for an expedition of this sort?

What would a trip like this cost?"—Tom Kieran, St. Louis, Mo.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—The French River district would suit you best, I believe. I will give

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you a brief outline of the prospects and you can judge for yourself.

French River is but eight or nine hours run (Canadian Pacific Railroad) from Toronto. The river district is practically virgin as a fishing and hunting field. The river is noted for its bass and maskinonge. The International Sportsman's Camp (tent accommodation) is located about a half a mile east of French station; also hotel accommodation is available if secured in advance. Reliable, and very patient guides, launches and skiffs and canoes and tents are on hire. Charges are reasonable for places of that description.

Write for rates and price lists to Mr. Dubois, Big Wood P. O. (International Sportsman's Camp), or to Mr. Wm. A. Elder, Big Wood, Ontario (The Bon Air), or to Mr. Marten H. Fenton, Wanikewin P. O., Pickeral River, Canadian Pacific Railroad, Ontario.

It is always cheapest to take your own fishing tackle, guns, ammunition and personal effects when on a trip of this kind, no matter how long you intend staying. Duty on such stuff is refunded on the return trip. I am not acquainted with the Newton ".30," but if it will stop a deer at one thousand yards it will do very nicely.

November 1st to the 15th is the open season for deer in Ontario; so your trip would have to include some part of those two weeks if you wanted the shooting. You will need one good rifle each, ammunition for same; buy in Toronto; fishing tackle for bass up to six pounds and maskinonge up to fifty pounds; wearing apparel suitable for the occasion. November days are bitter sometimes; and you'll need your pocketbook and a smile that won't rub off.

The cost of the trip is something else again. Obtain the cost of your railroad fares from your ticket agent there, your board and cost of guides, launches, canoes, etc., from the above addresses, add on incidentals such as duty, tips, etc., and figure it up for yourself. Board up there in pre-war days was $10.50 per week, board and lodging; guide and canoe (one person) $3 a day and up; launch $10 a day and up. I can't say what they are now.

The above information will apply to nearly any place in Ontario.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

HALL, G. E. Get in touch with your partner JAMES OWENS through the Aetna Ins. Co.

KELLEY, WYNNIE. Last heard of at the Katy Hotel, in Dallas, Texas. Write to your cousin.—Address L. B. FIELDS, 919 8th St., S. E., Washington, D. C.

THOMAS, FRANKLIN EUGENE. Last heard from in Lowell, Mich. Any information concerning him will be appreciated by his sister.—Address LOST TRAILS 376, care of *Adventure.*

DUNCAN, ED and ELLIS. Ed, fifty years of age, last seen in Colorado, follows R. R. work on Construction. Ellis last seen in Oklahoma; cook by trade. Ten dollars reward for correct address of either.—Address WOOD V. DUNCAN, U. S. Survey, Globe, Arizona.

ANSTETT, PERCY W. Last heard of in California. Write to 1120 Warfield Ave., Oakland. Good news. Important.—Address R. FEDERLE, 1120 Warfield Ave., Oakland, Calif.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

TUCKER, FRANCIS O. Formerly Troop C, 7th Cavalry. Information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address HARLEY J. CAMPBELL, Minburn, Iowa.

PHILIP, FRANK. Age sixteen. Last heard of in Los Angeles, Calif. You will learn something to your advantage by communicating with your old chum.—Address KIRK THOMPSON, 3345 30th Ave., So., Minneapolis, Minn.

JOHNSON, J. H. Several letters for you at general post-office, San Francisco. No malice toward you here. Come back or send money. No transportation. Love and trust same as I do. Your wife—LEAH.

McDONALD, JAMES. Plumber. Formerly of 735 East Washington Street, Los Angeles, Calif. Supposed to have enlisted in the Army during the late war. May be in Canada. Any information will be appreciated by his cousin.—Address "COUSIN TOM", care of *Adventure.*

BREESE, LIEUT. SIDNEY, V. C. Was discharged from the British Army on account of wounds, and worked with me in the Toledo Scales Co., Toledo, Ohio. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated. —Address JOHN DE COSTE, care of *Adventure.*

PARKER, JOS. S. Lived at 528 E. Adams St., Jacksonville, Fla., in 1912. Last heard from in Gulfport, Miss., remained there a few days. Important message for him. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address JOHN DE COSTE, care of *Adventure.*

SMITH, DR. HULBERT S. Dentist. Formerly of St. Louis and Kirkwood, Mo. Any information concerning him will be appreciated by his nephew.—Address E. LESLIE SCHELL, 176 Valley Road, West Orange, N. J.

NEIGER, B. "CHIP." Accountant. Purser on *Atlantic* in 1915. With me as paymaster of Honduras Division in 1916. Last heard of in Ohio. Of a restless nature. Write your old chief as I am going to the west coast of Mexico and can offer you something entertaining.—Address GEORGE L. CRAIG, care of Central Y. M. C. A., New York, N. Y.

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BURRILL GRAMMAR SCHOOL, Lynn, Mass. Any of those who graduated from there in 1908 please write to HENRY B. BRITT, C. C. M., U. S. S. *Lake Superior*, Norfolk, Virginia.

GORDON, MRS. AARON, *née* Hazel White. Last heard from December 20, 1916, at Joliet, Ill. Her mother was killed in an accident at Rockdale, Ill., Dec. 14, 1916. Any information will be gladly received.—Address MRS. JAMES M. RYAN, 706 W. Housatonic St., Pittsfield, Mass.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

KNOTTE, MAXIMILLAN LOUIS, relatives of. Died about 1860. Son of Adolphus Carl Knotte, Brussels, Belgium. Would like to get in touch with his friends or relatives, who may be in Canada, North Chicago, New York, or Belgium.—Address MRS. EUGINA KRIEGER, Box 134, Baldwin Lake Co., Michigan.

FLATTERY, MICHAEL A. Father. Engineer and contractor in Nebraska and Iowa. Connected with the firm of Brown & Douglas of Fort Dodge. He died in Ireland 1873. Will be pleased to hear from any of the old-timers who knew him in those days.—Address M. DOUGLAS FLATTERY, Orpheum Bldg., Hamilton Place, Boston, Mass.

SPIERS, JOHN. Uncle. Came to America from England in 1909. Lived in Philadelphia; I believe in Columbia Street. Worked for a ship firm in Philadelphia. Married in 1912. Since then I lost trail of him. Any information gladly received.—Address ROBERT E. BEWLEY, 4207 Drexel Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

DERRINGER, ALAN A. Last heard of at Ft. Wadsworth, N. Y., in 1916. Write your old bunkie of the Jolo, P. I., days.—Address H. P. ARMSTRONG, Med. Dept., Fort Hamilton, N. Y.

KARSTEAD, MRS. FRANK. Last heard from at Louisville, Kentucky. Husband connected with the Louisville R. R. May have gone to Knoxville, Tenn., in connection with East Tennessee R. R. Any information will be appreciated by her sister.—Address LOST TRAILS 376, care of *Adventure*.

THOMAS, HERBERT JEROME. Last seen about twenty-eight years ago, might have gone South through Kentucky and Tennessee to Chattanooga, and may have gone West later; also may have gone to Canada. Dark brown hair, blue eyes, brown mustache, about five feet six inches tall. In charge of interlock and switch tower for Michigan Central Railroad, Detroit. Any information concerning him will be gratefully appreciated by his sister.—Address LOST TRAILS 376, care of *Adventure*.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-August or First September issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirer from this magazine:

PARKER, HORACE; Belknap, Earl; Blitz, or Bliss, Joe; Conant, Herman, Jennie B.; Beecher, Harold; William Heywood; Coonerty, M. C.; Cosses, M. Angle; DeBolt, Alexander E.; Denniston, Thos. Greer; Duncan, Flossie; Flagg, Melvin L.; Fletcher, R. A.; Gillett, Frank M.; Griffith, Charlie E.; Hellman, Wm.; Heywood, Walter; Hoskins, Frank; Johnson, A. L. or L. A.; Klinger, Irving; Kenner, Alfred W.; L. S. F.; Lenning, Harry Gollander; Mac; Martin, Walter; Parker; Parrott, Thos. D.; Pleasant, Mr. or Mrs. Karl; Pollen, James; Powell, Malcolm; Rose, Jack or John LeMon; Roup, R. A.; Wheeler, Harold; Wright, Tom; Wunemburg, Wm. C.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; G. H. Bennett; Bryon Chisholm; Wm. S. Hilles; A. B. Paradis.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ARNOLD, TED; Aspinartos, A.; Brady, Grover C.; Brison, Clarence F.; Bishop, L. O.; Benson, E. W.; Babcock, Lucius A.; Beaton, G. M.; Carr, Mrs. Fred; Cosby, Arthur F.; Collins, John; Casselberry, Tex.; Coles, Bobby; Campbell, Frank U.; Dorr, H. S.; Engelby, B.; Geers, Mrs.; Harvey, Ted; Hines, Joseph; Harris, Walter J.; J. C. H.; Hart, Jack; Harding, James; Harrison, Tillson L.; Hiskert, Wm.; Hunt, Dan'l O'Connel; Johnson, Walter R.; Kuckaby, William; Kohn, Edward; Lee, Wm. R.; Lofler, Mrs. Harry; Leighton, Capt.; Larisy, Jack; Lee, C.; "Lonely Jock"; MacDonald, Donald Carr; MacMahon, J. A.; MacNamee, Alva I.; Miller, B. J.; Morrisy, K. A.; McCord, P. A.; Maples, C. M.; McGraw, John; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Nichols, Leon; Norman, Cook William; Richards, Lewis S.; Reid, Raymond; Rodgers, Stewart; Reed, H. W.; Schmidt, Walter; Scott, James F.; Seaman, W. E.; Shephard, H. O.; St. John, Irving T.; Stanley, Jack; Swan, George; Taylor, Jim; Von Gelucke, Byron; Wetherell, Delos E.; Ward, Frank B.; Williams, Bertram I.; Williams, Ray; Williams, W. P.; Western, S. S.; Yelton, Roy T.; Young, Leon.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you. —Address E. F. BRACE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FIRST OCTOBER ADVENTURE

Two of the stories that come to you with our next issue are mentioned on the second page of this number. Here are the others:

THE BRIGHTEST JEWEL OF THEM ALL. **A Complete Novelette**
A story of Calcutta, of a secret society there—and of *Menzies*. ***By S. B. H. Hurst***

CHANGED ***By Gordon Young***
Down in the South Seas they called *Dick Furlong* a coward.

LYNCH LAWYERS. Part III ***By William Patterson White***
Things happen quickly and violently as *Red Kane* rides hot on the trail of the men who robbed the express office at Farewell.

GODFATHER TO SATAN'S KITCHEN ***By Hapsburg Liebe***
"*Bear Creek*" *Buckmaster* they call him, and they wonder why he hasn't been hung. And if it hadn't been for *Little Billy Bly*——

WHILE RIVERS RUN ***By Farnham Bishop***
"Tonight I fecht for my ane hand," says *Cameron* down in Panama, where the San Blas Indians are.

THE EIGHT VULTURES OF KWANG-HO ***By Robert J. Pearsall***
Hazard and *Partridge* fight the octopus that is spread over China.

RED BELTS. Conclusion ***By Hugh Pendexter***
The second and last instalment of a stirring story of pioneer days and *Chucky Jack Sevier*.

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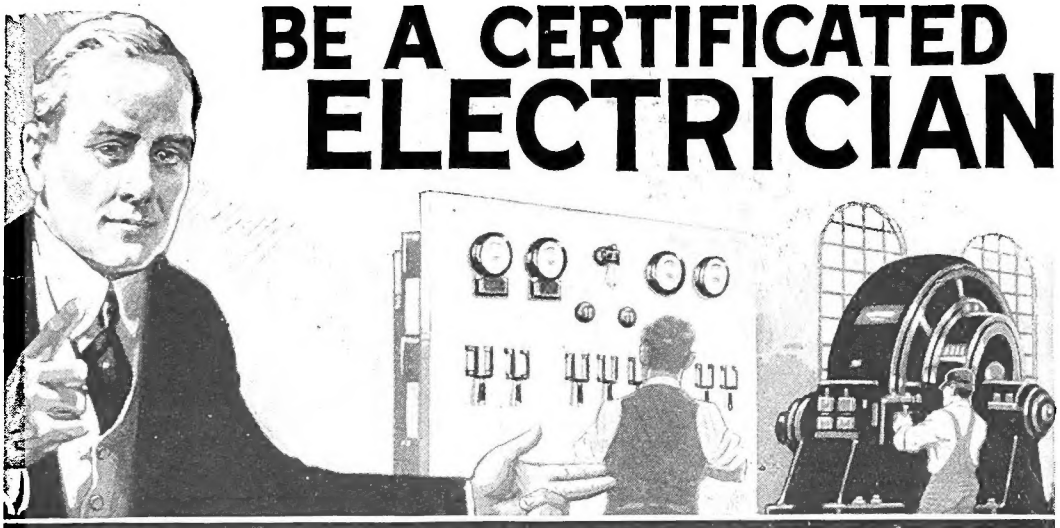

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As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works I know exactly the kind of training a man needs to enable him to get and hold good positions, and to earn big pay. I have trained hundreds of men who are holding splendid electrical positions. Many are now successful **Electrical Contractors.**

I give each of my students personal attention and a complete and thorough training. I give him a SPLENDID ELECTRICAL OUTFIT FREE, and much of the training is done by actual work. When my students graduate and receive their Certificate they are ready for a real position. But **still more,** at any time you wish you can come to our splendidly equipped Electrical Shops for special training. No other school can give you this.

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You naturally smoke

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OM*AROMA*R spells aroma—
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The American Tobacco Co.
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OMAR
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"Smoke Omar for Aroma"

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